Losing and finding oneself in a book: the mysterious immersive experience of reading literary fiction

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Abstract

This research explores the process of immersive literary reading, seeking to understand what happens within the psyche of a reader successfully engaged with a work of fiction. Drawing on a bricolage methodology combining conceptual research, heuristic enquiry, and the innovative practice of using a novel itself as a methodology, the experience is investigated from theoretical and personal perspectives. Theoretical ideas come from a broad psychoanalytic base as well as concepts from literary theory, and the portal novel is Alain-Fournier's *Le grand Meaulnes*. The researcher also analyses her own personal experience of reading, documented through the keeping of reading journals, as raw data from which to derive insight into the process. The thesis is that successful engagement in the reading of a literary novel can be a therapeutic and transformational experience, and four key paradoxes are identified: (1) that this type of reading requires a sophisticated level of literary ability, whilst at the same time the reader is required to engage in a regressed, childlike mentality, which juxtaposition is termed a ***sophisticated paranoid schizoid position***, (2) that it is incumbent upon the reader to let go at a deep level of egoic concerns, whilst deriving simultaneously a sense of omnipotence in creating that which is being read in the imagination, (3) that as the reader loses herself in the pages of the book, she also finds herself reflected back within them and has the possibility of transformational understanding of previously unconscious aspects of herself, and (4) that while reading is an intensely private and personal undertaking (the whole process taking place within the reader's imagination), the reader is, at the point of reading, connecting to humanity at large (by virtue of suspending boundaries between self and other) and also specifically those who have previously read the book across the ages.

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Preface

"Mysteriously, we continue to read without a satisfactory definition of what it is we are doing. We know that reading is not a process that can be explained through a mechanical model" (Manguel, 1996, p. 39).

Apart, perhaps, from the illustrious Dr Johnson, who commented of Milton's ***Paradise Lost***, that "its perusal is a duty rather than a pleasure" (Hill, 1905, p. 183), few of the reading community would disagree that the purpose of reading literary fiction is pleasure. Exploring the nature of this process, however, is more problematic, for "once we turn from the experience of making sense of texts to the experience of enjoying them, we have almost no vocabulary at all" (Hellenga, 1982, pp. 112-113). Roland Barthes (1975) goes yet further, affirming that the experience of reading what he refers to as "texts of bliss" actually defies adequate verbal description.

The brief of this research was to take on this somewhat daunting task and consider what happens when a reader reads a piece of literary fiction, to explore the nature of the relationship between reader and text, seeking to enlighten something of the obfuscation around the phenomenon, whilst also appreciating and celebrating its mystery. What happens to enable the reader to lose herself[1] in the narrative she reads and how does it come about that she might potentially be transformed in the process? "The question underlying ... is thus not "*what* does the story mean?" but rather "*how* does the story mean?"" (Felman, 1977, p. 119).

My task in this project has been to seek to extrapolate an understanding of the ways in which conscious suggestion (found in fictional narrative) interacts with unconscious processes within the reader's psyche and coalesces in the experience of engaging with a novel; to consider how the cognitive function of assimilating the data of the storyline and tracing the elements of the plot, whilst at the same time engaging with imaginative processes evoked by the text's descriptions, juxtaposes

[1] I use the feminine pronouns and agreements *she, herself,* etc. throughout to refer to the reader to avoid cumbersome constructions *he/she*, etc.

with distractions of the reader's own memories and identifications which are awakened through her reveries. Because I have to do principally with discussion of unconscious processes, the main body of theory referred to is drawn from psychoanalysis. The emphasis of psychoanalytic thinking is in relation to clinical issues, Freud, himself, noting "only rarely does the psychoanalyst feel impelled to engage in aesthetic investigations ... He works in other strata of the psyche and has little to do with the emotional impulses that provide the usual subject matter of aesthetics ..." (1908/2003, p. 123). In this research, however, which has been undertaken using a bricolage of conceptual and heuristic enquiry, drawing on my own personal experiences of immersive literary reading, I turn a spotlight on how unconscious processes may be observed in the reading of literature to clarify the psychic state of the reader, and offer some tentative conclusions based on theoretical analysis.

The specificity of "the reader"

Throughout this exploration, I refer to "the reader" whilst holding awareness of the heterogeneity of readership. Each reader is, of course, unique, as is each reading of any literary work by the same person. The diversity of the reading population means that issues of personal difference may prejudice or predetermine how a particular reader approaches a designated piece of fiction. Socioeconomic divides may elicit pleasure or anxiety at the thought of reading, where difficult experiences of education may generate antipathy (Hooks, 2000); cognitive problems associated with neurological disorders (such as ADD or developmental delay) may preclude a satisfactory reading experience altogether; ambivalence or anger may be evoked by traditionally accepted interpretations of specific texts (for example, Felman's (1993) critique of feminist readings of the works of Balzac); cultural resentments may surface among those groups where literary fiction is the domain of a privileged minority (Abel, 1993); diversity of age may impact the appeal or otherwise of certain genres; differing sexualities and gender groups may have specific preferences (Abel, 1982; Jacobus, 1986; Moi, 1985; Woolf, 1979) and/or be attracted to alternative pursuits, simply as a personal preference. Whilst all these areas raise

interesting discussion points, which would be welcome topics for a follow-up study, it is outside the scope of my remit to address the issue of the heterogeneity and specificity of the reader and at a tangent to my central exploration which asks the question of what happens psychically to ***a reader who is engaged in the process of immersive literary reading***. In other words, my baseline is the province of a successful reading experience, rather than exploring the diversity of issues related to the idiosyncrasy of the reader which may mitigate against that. The singularity of each individual reading experience makes it unique. Nevertheless, there are, I have found, some key psychic processes which may be extrapolated, and my research is into an exploration of these.

Reading and the other arts

The other point in relation to the specificity of my research question is that it is limited to the immersive reading of literary fiction, as distinct from other allied aesthetic/cultural activities like watching television or going to the theatre or cinema. There are many similarities in the nature of these pursuits and the experience of the participant: teleologically, they are all undertaken consciously for the purpose of pleasure; they require a stance of motor inactivity; the reader/spectator is unfettered from the compunction to act in relation to the activity (the visitor to the art gallery able to look upon Tracey Emin's (unmade) *My bed* (1998), for example, without exercising a desire to tidy it up); the full attention/concentration (with the possible exception of trance eating) of the participant is required; a type of merger is effected between the reader/spectator and the activity such that boundaries between self and Other, reality and fiction are undifferentiated and the participant is in a dreamlike state; there is a willingness to suspend disbelief and engage in an alternative, liminal reality. I explore these points in my discussions in connection with the immersive reading experience in chapter five.

There are, however, significant differences in the experience of immersive literary reading and aesthetic spectator activities, which is why my research

excludes these visual pursuits. First of all, reading engages a different set of non-visual stimuli from those essential for an appreciation of theatre or cinema. As suggested by the nomenclature, reading also requires a more active input from the reader than does watching a play from the spectator; whereas film etc. is more passive, the former drawing upon the reader's imagination and interpretation, the latter being presented in line with the producer's interpretation to the cinemagoer. The former (reading) happens in private, whereas the latter is usually in an external arena and social context. Reading happens at the reader's own pace and is, thus, more within her control, being subject to her being able to re-read some passages or skim over others at will, whereas a film/play has a fixed trajectory which cannot be altered by the individual viewer at will. Literary fiction includes insights into the characters' thoughts and feelings which can only be surmised or inferred from the cinema screen, where most of the content is shown through action. This is particularly the case with the theatre, where the actors' facial expressions may not be easily discernible, so spectator interpretation is dependent on the actual dialogue (both the words and the intonation of the actor) and observation of the players' behaviour, all of these being external factors.

A further, more nuanced phenomenon is also present in the visual arts (and particularly the theatre), in that the audience are aware at some level that the players are players. The set before them is very clearly a set, as the frame of the stage is visible throughout. They know that, even though a protagonist may have died in the course of the story, she will be resurrected at the end of the play and come to take her bow with the rest of the cast. Similarly, with well-known actors on screen, there will be some awareness among those watching that the stars are acting a part because they are familiar and known in other guises. Dame Judi Dench is not just M in the James Bond movies (Broccoli & Wilson, 2008), for example, but also Philomena (Coogan, Seaward & Tana, 2013), Miss Mattie (Birtwistle, 2007), Lady Bracknell (Thompson & Brown, 2002), and a plethora of other alter egos. She is recognisable as herself, the actress, in any role that she plays. This introduces a third dimension into the relationship between an individual screen character and

the spectator, whose connection operates at a dual level, and this sets the experience apart from that of immersive literary reading, where the characters have no such alternative existence outside of who they are in the novel. The possibility of the reader forging a strong dyadic relationship with them is, therefore, much greater.

Why fiction?

Another key point is the fact that my research is limited to the experience of reading literary fiction, as opposed to reading in general including non-fiction texts. In chapter five I discuss more fully in the light of reader response theory (Holland, 1975, 1976b, 2009a, 2009b) some of the important differences between reading fiction and non-fiction: that the attitude with which the reader approaches a novel involves the willing suspension of disbelief (Coleridge, 1817), which Holland (2009) clarifies to mean holding off from reality testing (2009). This is also linked to a *do-not-act* mental response (Holland, 2014 personal communication), and so frees the reader up to relax into inactivity. He also demonstrates a link between reading fiction and the regressed psychic state (Holland, 1975) which I see as a key component in a successful experience. I draw also in chapter six on Rosenblatt's (1960, 1982, 1986, 1994, 1998) distinction between *efferent* and *aesthetic* reading, the latter being for pleasure and also reflecting the psychic state of the reader of fiction (the former concerned with reading to extrapolate knowledge).

My research, then, is into the nature of the experience of the successful immersive reading of literary fiction, which, although it shares some elements of overlap with the reading of non-fiction and the experience of others of the arts, is, I hold, a unique undertaking. Likewise, whilst I acknowledge the huge contribution that literary theory has made to the collective understanding of reading, my interest in this research is more specifically focused on seeking to illuminate some of the distinctive processes which coalesce in this wonderful, mysterious experience. In the same way as it is not about the reader, herself, neither is it about specific literature *per se.* I am not concerned with literary criticism or the consideration of particular genres of texts. These would, as with a deeper exploration of the

specificity of the reader, be interesting, allied lines of research for some future study but are excluded from the parameters of the present research. For the purposes of this investigation, the two parties in this relationship (the reader and the text) are considered in so far as they are essential to studying the phenomenon of the ***process*** of immersive literary reading.

In addition to referring to the ideas of such literary theorists as Barthes (1975, 1977), Brooks (1977, 1984, 1994), De Certeau (1984) and Rosenblatt (1960, 1982, 1986, 1994, 1998), I draw substantially on psychoanalytic theory, partly because I have a strong personal interest and professional background in it, and partly because it brings to bear a unique perspective on the unconscious processes of the person of the reader, which is lacking from the cerebral focus of literary criticism. I develop ideas from key theorists Benjamin (1990, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2018), Bollas (1978, 1982, 1987, 1989, 1992, 1995, 1996a, 1999, 2006, 2009), Freud (1899, 1900, 1901/2002a, 1908/2003, 1911, 1920-1922), Klein (1923, 1930, 1946, 1958, 1975), Milner (1950/2010, 1952, 1969, 1987a, 1987b, 1987c) and Winnicott (1945, 1953, 1958, 1960, 1963b, 1965/1990, 1967a, 1967b, 1969, 1971) in the course of discussing my thesis.

Synopsis of chapters

Aspects of my thesis are necessarily overlapping and interrelated, the whole comprising an integration of concepts that are both associated and distinct, drawing upon a chain of multifarious signifiers, each of which shines a spotlight on a particular facet of the theory. In line with my methodology and subject matter embracing literature and the unconscious (rather than logic and rationality), there is a creative fluidity to the manner in which the topic has been approached and the way in which I have written it up reflects this. Whilst there is a clear structure in the way in which ideas and findings have been presented, it does not follow a conventional paradigm. I set out below a brief summary of the key elements addressed, chapter by chapter.

Chapter one: Methodology

By way of introduction to the project, I classify my research methodology as a bricolage of adopting a feminine approach to conceptual research (Dreher, 2000), coupled with elements of heuristics and autoethnography (Moustakas, 1990, Sultan, 2019). My enquiry sits within the school of psychosocial studies, itself a hybrid which spans and challenges traditional academic core models (Frosh, 2015) to arrive at new transdisciplinary knowledge. In line with the social constructionist epistemology adopted by psychosocial researchers, knowledge is seen to be created in the light of its wider social and historical context (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Flick, 2015). Feminine writing (Cixous, 1975) sits very comfortably with this, valuing as it does tacit knowing (Hoult, 2012), and draws, as does heuristics, on creative, idiographic methods. The intention is to show, rather than tell, and, in line with this, I present also the innovative practice of using a piece of literary fiction itself as a methodology. Alain-Fournier's work *Le grand Meaulnes* (1913/1971) is the portal novel on which I draw in this way throughout my research, showing how the journey taken by the eponymous hero is also the journey of the literary reader. Literature is used in three ways throughout the research: (1) as a methodology and illustration of the processes discussed, (2) in the interspersing of short vignettes from literature to substantiate my points, and (3) as a source of primary data for my own reading journals, which are quoted throughout as part of the heuristic method. While literature and literary reading are integral to the process in this way, I do not engage in literary criticism of the works cited. Finally, I acknowledge my own investment in the research, which only fully emerged at the end of the process, when I came to the point of realisation that, by championing the merits of scholarly reading, I was at some previously unconscious level, seeking to validate my own position of reading as being a defence against living.

Chapter two: The psychodynamics of reading

This chapter introduces some of the main elements of the thesis and presents preliminary findings in the light of extant literature on the topic. I start by drawing attention to the nature of the relationship between text and reader, which I describe

as both symbiotic and intersubjective, symbiotic because text and reader are mutually dependent (the text exists to be read and is only alive in the psyche of the reader and the reader is only a reader so long as she is reading the text), and intersubjective because each actively affects/changes the other. I illustrate the difference in approach to reading fiction and non-fiction and highlight the "willing suspension of disbelief" (Coleridge, 1817, n.p.) or refraining from reality testing as a key mental attitude that typifies the former. That the reader participates actively at the same time as deliberately needing to abandon herself to the occupation is discussed as one of the paradoxes of the reading process, and that this mindset might be deemed regressed is central to my argument that the reader occupies both a psychically primitive position whilst engaging advanced literary and symbolic skills. I term this state ***sophisticated paranoid schizoid***, building on Klein (1958, 1975) and Bion (1967/2007b), and see it as *sine qua non* for a successful literary reading experience. Debate follows of the scholarly nature of the text and the distinctive character of the language, being evocative and elevated beyond normal colloquial usage, and, therefore, ***odd*** (Knights, 1995), as well as the mechanism of exaggeration which, I conclude, mirrors developmental processes (Diem-Wille, 2011), and forms part of the literary container. The chapter finishes with some thoughts about the value of the articulation function of literature (also part of the containment) as well as the opportunity reading affords to "see through other eyes" (Hellenga, 1982), gaining a fresh perspective on life, with transformational potential (Bollas, 1987).

Chapter three: *Le grand Meaulnes*

In this chapter I show how *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971) is the story of the reader of literary fiction and explore my claim that reading this novel gives the reader a first-hand experience of what happens in literary reading. Tracing elements of the story I open up a commentary on the phenomenology of reading, starting with initial anticipation and the reader's deliberate quest for pleasure and temporarily to find respite from everyday life. I explore the ***state-of-curiousness***, which I found characterises the necessary mental position of the reader

and discuss how this needs to be balanced with a capacity for "negative capability" (Bion, 1970, p. 125) (to sustain not knowing). As Meaulnes throws himself into his adventure, embracing and participating in the events that unfold, so, I find, the successful immersive literary reader abandons herself to the pursuit and loses herself in it. Her imagination and state of enchantment with the narrative keep it alive in her psyche and facilitate her regression to an early psychic state of merger with it. Drawing on the writing of Bachelard (1961a), I show how in the act of reading the reader is able to recapture a primal sense of blissful connection to the cosmos, associated with an archetypal innocence. From this state, as Meaulnes does, she may undergo a transformation, she being changed as a result of engaging in this way with her text. I note also the disjuncture often experienced at reintegrating into normal life. Meaulnes struggles to revert to his old schoolboy routine and is constantly seeking to educe the idyll of the *domaine étrange*, and the reader, lost in her novel, may take time to readjust to real-life circumstances. Finally, I explore the question of the violence of the reader, and her sense of possessiveness of the text and the reading experience, drawing attention to Meaulnes's parthenogenetic relationship with his adventure and his daughter (the fruit of it).

Chapter four: Letting go

Drawing on a principle established by Marion Milner (1950/2010) in her own struggles to be able to paint, I explore the question of the need for the immersive literary reader to abdicate control and abandon herself to the reading process and show, with examples from my own journalling, that if a state of letting go can be achieved, then a gateway is open to unconscious knowledge and the possibility of personal transformation. I suggest that the reader may be said to merge with her text, dissolving boundaries between herself and it, and inhabit an undifferentiated psychic state, which necessitates the laying down of her ego defences. Optimal conditions in order to achieve this include, I find, an externally conducive environment (without social impingements or agenda) as well as an internal lack of preoccupation and willingness to lose the self during the process. Explicit allusion

is also made to the journey of Augustin Meaulnes in my portal novel (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971), as I show how he allows himself to be taken over by the mists that descend, participate fully in his adventure, and emerge a changed person, mirroring the potential for the successful reading experience.

Chapter five: Anna Karenina

Working with an extended extract from *Anna Karenina* (Tolstoy, 1873-1877/1999), various phenomena are discussed which illustrate elements of my thesis. I propound the need for the reader to adopt a regressed psychic state, facilitated by a conscious choice to suspend disbelief and abandon herself to the world of fiction, letting go of egoic preoccupations and merging with it. I highlight the necessity for physical stillness and show how bodily movement is used by Anna in the novel to mitigate against maintaining an undefended state of openness to her reading; how, additionally, in exhibiting envy of the characters in her text, she seeks to avoid facing the unpleasant truths which present themselves through her reverie. I find that where envy is present, the ego is also in evidence, and this precludes the requisite surrendering to the reading experience which might bring about transformational insight. The chapter also discusses the phenomenon of the reader's reverie and I conclude that this also demonstrates a regressed liminal and undifferentiated psychic state, thinking as it does in images rather than concepts.

Chapter six: Intersubjectivity

This chapter is devoted to consideration of the nature of the relationship between reader and text, which I characterise as ***intersubjective***. The text comes alive only within the psyche of the reader at the point of being read, and the reader is only a reader at the point of engaging with a text. Active/passive I find an unhelpful binary in terms of describing the relationship, though I explore elements of both in the reader's stance, but reading itself is presented as a co-creation, a joint enterprise. My sense is that there needs to be sufficient attunement between the reading pair to sustain the occupation, and that it needs to remain a dyadic connection, without the intrusion of a third party. I theorise that for the reader in the act of reading a

reversal of normal developmental relations occurs: that, whereas developing an understanding of a human Other for a neonate starts from a mental position of constructing her mentally in her (the infant's) own image and incrementally moves to a recognition of the other person's existence in her own right, in the case of reading, the characters in the text start from a discrete, objective existence (on the page) and move to a position of being subjectively created in the mind of the individual reader (Winnicott, 1960, 1969). Building also on Winnicott's (1963b) concept of being found, I conclude that most object relations theories are about the others (objects) in an individual's world, whereas the experience of immersive literary reading affords an opportunity also to ***be*** the Other, and find oneself reflected back in the pages of the book, known and recognised by the text.

Chapter seven: Transformational potential

Bringing raw data from my own journalled reading experience this chapter centres around the question of what facilitates the opportunity for reading to be transformational and what mitigates against it. My conclusion is that the reader may both consciously and unconsciously stymie this potential, by being unwilling to surrender a defensive ego position. I explore reading experiences of my own where this has also been the case, as well as citing other occasions where I did surrender, and transformation occurred. I conclude that in the process of immersive reading, the reader has occasion to find herself known in a deep way, but that, in order to sustain the requisite level of engagement with the text, there needs also to be a continuous sense of enchantment (both cognitive and emotional) throughout the activity. The process of transformation may occur at the point of reading, but in order for the reader to acknowledge and assimilate its therapeutic effects, she needs, subsequent to the reading, to reflect upon her experience. This cannot be done from a merged position at the point of reading, even though the transformation itself may occur at that point.

Chapter eight: Reading and the unconscious

Following on from recognising the transformational potential of individual, specific reading experiences where personal epiphanies enhance the life of the reader, in this chapter I present my conclusion that, in addition to discrete moments of generative insight, the reading experience is *per se* beneficial and life-giving, by virtue of the fact that the process, whilst engaging the conscious mind in the narrative, frees up the unconscious mind. The suspension of normal, social super-ego constraints in this way liberates the psyche to connect with the unconscious, and this is a rare phenomenon in waking life. Immersive literary reading provides this exceptional opportunity. I chart how my initial question was to discover the conditions necessary to make the literary reading experience successful (how life needed to accommodate the reading experience) and how, in the course of the research, this morphed into a consideration of how ***the process*** of immersive literary reading itself enhances life. I draw here on Bollas's (1995) thinking of the integral object. In this chapter I also discuss the question of whether the text has an unconscious, citing there being no other explanation for the phenomenon of synchronicity, as when a reader picks up the exact novel which speaks to her situationally and profoundly at a particular time in her life, seemingly by coincidence.

Chapter nine: Conclusion

My concluding remarks summarise my thesis as a series of interdependent and overlapping paradoxes. The methodology itself juxtaposes conceptual research with heuristic enquiry, combining a theoretical position with intensely personal exploration. I introduce also the unique angle of using a novel itself as a method to demonstrate the process to the reader. Initially I highlight four principal paradoxes: (1) that immersive literary reading requires simultaneously the exercise of sophisticated scholarly capacity (for both literacy and an understanding of the symbolic) and also that the reader adopt a regressed, primitive state of mind with respect to her text (a mentality I am terming ***sophisticated paranoid schizoid***), whereby she suspend disbelief and merge in an attitude of wonder with the

unfolding narrative; (2) that this state of relinquishing control and abandoning herself to the Other (of the text) is coupled with an illusion of omnipotence, that she creates the characters in her imagination; (3) that in the process of immersion in the reading process, the reader both loses and finds herself: the anonymity she enjoys because the process takes place entirely within her own psyche and so affords a sense of hiddenness and safety, is coupled with occasions in the reading where she finds herself intimately known through what she reads, as if a spotlight is shone upon private, intimate parts of the her life and she is exposed; and (4) that the process of immersive literary reading is both deeply personal and private and yet contemporaneously connects the reader with global humanity, both in the sense of a common understanding of the human condition, and in making a specific link to the universal readership of that particular text across time. I end my conclusions with a final paradox: that immersive scholarly reading may on the one hand be generative and life-enhancing, opening the reader, as it does, to the possibility of transformational insights and processes, and yet on the other may mitigate against life, as the ultimate acceptable face of psychic retreat (Steiner, 1993), a pretext for avoiding life and withdrawing from it. The question is posed as to whether life itself has to be suspended or surrendered in order to engage successfully with the reading experience, or whether, as borne out by my own experience, the therapeutic benefits of immersive literary reading might be found to be more restorative than years of psychotherapy.

Chapter one: Methodology

"Cartesian dualism: the detachment of the academic from the personal, the objective from subjective, subject from object, remains strong in the social sciences. It remains a risk to work autobiographically, to acknowledge the importance of the personal and the self within the research process" (West, 1994, p. 189).

This research has been a deep journey of discovery, drawing into the recesses of my own psyche as I have engaged in an exploration of the mysterious process of immersive literary reading, and the unique psychic space inhabited by the reader, my own experience of reading providing my primary data.

I set out in this chapter a description of, and rationale for, my methodology, which complements the ethos of my subject. I show how adopting a feminine[2] approach to conceptual research, coupled with elements of heuristic and autoethnographic method, have combined into a creative synthesis, detailed in the following chapters. My research set out to explore the curious experience of the immersive reading of literary fiction, to wonder about the psychic space inhabited by a reader engaged in the pastime and consider something of the dynamics that pertain between her and her reading, particularly enquiring into what happens in the process (when deemed to be successful and enjoyable) to make it so generative and potentially transformational. I distinguish between the reading of fiction and non-fiction texts, as, although the two processes share some common characteristics (such as a reader's capacity for literacy and concentration), I see them as very different experiences, which claim I will now clarify, before going on to specify my research methodology and methods, and then show how I have incorporated literature in three distinct ways in the project.

Why fiction?

I have chosen to research what happens in the process of reading literary fiction (exclusively fiction and not non-fiction), partly because this is whence my interest

[2] I use the term in the Cixousian (1975) sense, to denote an attitude, traditionally used to describe women, but now understood to embrace broader elements of intuitive ways of knowing, researching and writing

emanates, but also because I believe there is a significant difference in the way a reader approaches a fictional text that goes beyond the purpose of the reading, but has very much to do with it, that is a key factor in what can make the experience transformational. Teleologically undertaking a reading specifically for the purpose of pleasure is a world away from seeking literature in order to elicit information and/or for academic learning. I draw principally on the work of three different theorists here to make my argument. First, I cite Holland's (1975, 1976a, 1976b, 2009a, 2009b) ideas of reader response theory, where he illustrates the differences in readers' approaches to the two genres by a simple empirical experiment. I complement this with the writing of Rosenblatt (1960, 1982, 1986, 1994), who identifies two separate types of reading experiences: *aesthetic* and *efferent*, the former for pleasure, the latter to acquire information. I then consider the work of Roland Barthes (1975, 1977) and the distinction he makes between *readerly* and *writerly* texts, the former being a more passive form of reading, where the reader is seen as joining up the dots that the author has laid out for her, in contrast to the latter, where the reader is jointly viewed as co-creating the story.

Holland, an American literary critic, was primarily interested in individuals' responses to what they read. He coined an experiment which he reproduced in print (1975), whereby readers believed themselves to be reading a paragraph of historical writing, which they discovered, after having read it, was, in fact, fiction. The difference in their reported responses to this exercise was interesting, and my own reaction when I read it concurred with that of those enlisted in the experiment. The crucial difference indicated that readers relaxed more on knowing that the extract was fiction. Holland attributes this to the fact that readers reality-test non-fiction texts, constantly questioning the validity of what is presented, whereas when wittingly reading a novel, the reader can relax into it, knowing it is not intended as objective truth and veracity is not an issue. He discusses at some length the issue of the "willing suspension of disbelief" (Coleridge, 1817) as typifying the mental attitude in which a reader approaches a work of fiction, though goes on to think of it more accurately as being a suspension of critical mental function (Holland, 1975)

rather than disbelief. Additionally, he goes on to cite the fact that, when reading literary fiction, the reader knows that she does not have to act on what she reads. So, even if the narrative is frightening or presents ethical dilemmas, there is no compunction to do anything in response to what is presented; the reader is simply required to absorb the story without having to make any decision or take any action. This is, I maintain, a persuasive argument for regarding the reading of fiction as a very different experience from the reading of non-fiction and my decision to focus only on this type of reading, to the exclusion of the latter, aligns with these ideas. Although a reader may be using the same literacy skills to decipher and interpret words on a page, the emotional and psychic experience of reading fiction and non-fiction is quite distinct. In chapter four of this research, I develop these ideas further and consider the importance of the reader letting go of ego concerns and merging with the (fictional) text, in order to engage fully with the experience. This, I argue, is qualitatively different for the reader of non-fiction. Although intense concentration may also be a prerequisite in this case, the nature of the reader's emotional and psychic response to what she reads is markedly dissimilar.

I also discuss more fully in chapter six in this connection another distinction that Rosenblatt (1960, 1982, 1986, 1994) adumbrates between *aesthetic* and *efferent* approaches to reading, the former applying to the mental stance adopted when reading fiction, the latter referring to non-fiction. By way of example, Rosenblatt (1994) contrasts the leisurely, unhurried attitude of a reader with her novel, to a mother's urgent desire to ascertain information on a poison bottle, on discovering that her child has inadvertently swallowed some of the contents. In the latter case, the mystery of the composition of the liquid is a source of anxiety rather than something to be enjoyed, as it might be when encountered in the context of, for example, a detective novel, where mystery and not-knowing are a pleasurable part of the experience. Thus, these two short synopses illustrate the world of difference between reading fiction for pleasure and reading non-fiction for educational purposes. My research relates only to the former. I engage in chapter six with the

debate as to whether a text *per se* might be regarded as aesthetic, or whether, in fact, as I conclude, the nomenclature has more to do with capturing the attitude with which a particular literary work is approached by a reader.

A further theorist advancing arguments to differentiate between discrete types of reading is literary critic and semiologist, Roland Barthes. He distinguishes *readerly* and *writerly* (fictional) literature (Barthes, 1975, 1977; Sontag, 2000). The former, focused on the reader's capacity passively to follow the author's intention and the clues provided to trace the plot, he contrasts with the latter where the reader's subjective contribution to the process is crucial. Writerly reading is viewed as a collaborative process between reader and text, where the whole reading experience is venerated *per se*, not just as a means to an end (following the plot) but in order to value the reader's enjoyment of evocative turns of phrase, the nuances of language, and her interpretation of the characters' lives being endowed with the subjective qualities of her own reminiscences and life experiences, such that Barthes would hold that any individual reading of a text is the reader's composition, rather than the author's (Bogue, 1980). Further, Barthes allies readerly texts with a kind of *horizontal* reading, signifying that the process is linear, more two-dimensional, focused uniquely on the storyline rather than the literary quality of the writing, and writerly texts with a *vertical* reading experience, of deeper quality. Horizontal reading of readerly texts may provide enjoyment and be what he terms "texts of pleasure" (Barthes, 1975, p. 117), whereas that writerly literature which entails vertical reading Barthes refers to as "texts of bliss" (1975, p. 119), affording ecstasy or "jouissance" (literally *orgasm*) because of the intensity of the reading experience. That the starting point of Barthes's thinking is the text itself means that, while there are reasons to hold in mind his distinction, I am coming from a different place, because the focus of my research is the ***reader's experience of reading***. I am, however, exploring that vertical, writerly experience of reading that Barthes would accord to texts of bliss, it being the process of in-depth psychic immersion and regression that features in my thinking.

The thesis that I am offering, then, has to do with the psychic journey of the reader into this mysterious realm of the reading of literary fiction. "Literature is uncanny", say Bennett and Royle (2016, p. 35), who go on to elaborate:

> The uncanny has to do with a sense of strangeness, mystery or eeriness. More particularly, it concerns a sense of unfamiliarity that appears at the very heart of the familiar, or else a sense of familiarity that appears at the very heart of the unfamiliar (Bennett & Royle, 2016, p. 35).

It is not coincidental that the word "novel" is derived from the French "nouvel", meaning new, strange, uncanny (Hoad, 1996). Unsurprisingly, the experience of reading literary fiction is, itself, uncanny. Summed up within the paradox that Bennett and Royle remark upon, is the essence of the strangeness of familiarity and unfamiliarity coinciding to create this novel experience. (I use the pun intentionally). Furthermore, the process by which I engaged in undertaking this research may also be considered somewhat novel or uncanny also, and I now proceed to discuss my methodology.

Research methodology: Feminine conceptual research

Were I asked to classify this research taxonomically, I would categorise it as a "bricolage methodology" (Rogers, 2012; Yardley, 2008), the term *bricolage* first having been coined by anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss (Given, 2008) to convey the sense of a patchwork, a bringing together of disparate strands to form a creative whole. It stands outside of traditional quantitative research methods (Bazeley, 2018; Jensen & Laurie, 2016), embracing a subjectivist ontological perspective, and a unique individual take on qualitative enquiry.

It is eminently fitting that I adopt a bricolage approach to my research, as it sits within the school of psychosocial studies, which, itself, transcends the parameters of a traditional, purist discipline, embracing, as it does, both psychic (individual) and social (relational) elements. As Frosh qualifies:

> A discipline is a field of study that is organized according to accepted principles, so the community of scholars who work in it know what its interests are … and agree the range of practices that can be drawn on to explore these … (2015, p. 2).

Psychosocial research encompasses a vast spectrum of subjects and perspectives and seeks to challenge and work across conventional disciplinary boundaries, to arrive at a new perspective and "unsettle existing knowledge" (Frosh, 2015, p. 3). It places a high premium on valuing subjective ways of knowing, seeing the person of the researcher and her motivations as a key component in understanding the phenomenon in question, holding the post-modern perspective of needing to identify and value the specific situation of the research. Epistemologically, it sits within a social constructionist paradigm (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Flick, 2015), whereby knowledge is seen to be created in the light of its wider social and historical context, which factors are actively acknowledged and celebrated by psychosocial researchers. There is an equally disparate accompanying range of methodologies and methods embraced within the discipline, which reflects its diversity and breadth, and it is eminently suitable to draw on a bricolage of methods, to hold in tension different, complementary strands of enquiry. My contribution to this exciting, creative, and innovative playing field draws together ideas and concepts from the specialities of psychoanalytic thought and literary theory to explore the experience of reading literary fiction.

I would most neatly define my methodology as a bricolage of a type of feminine conceptual research and heuristics, incorporating elements of autoethnography. My understanding of the concept of feminine writing draws on the work of Hélène Cixous, one of its leading advocates. Synthesising with the psychosocial perspective of traversing the boundaries of purist disciplines, *écriture feminine* (Cixous, 1975, p. 14) attempts to break away from traditional stereotypical academic writing and schools of thought, to embrace a more fluid style, incorporating metaphor and unconventional ways of writing. In an interview with Verena Andermatt Conley (1991, preface, xii), Cixous is quoted as saying: "… [the] feminine can be read as the living, as something that continues to escape all

boundaries, that cannot be pinned down, controlled or even conceptualized. It is a drive to life – always related to otherness". This accords well with my study, as I am bringing an alternative approach to a familiar topic, an unusual perspective on an everyday occurrence.

Feminine writing is not the exclusive province of women, Cixous (1975) is at pains to point out but occurs across the gender divide and refers rather to a "decipherable libidinal femininity" (Conley, 1991, p. 129), that challenges the hierarchical, logocentric/phallocentric position, which holds to a belief in right/wrong attitudes, outcomes, ways of seeing things, etc. Because libidinal femininity is not limited to one organ, it being more cosmic, creative and non-linear ways of communicating are its currency, and a multiplicity of interpretations possible. The dynamism of this is unquestionable, as Hoult summarises:

> *L'écriture feminine* posits writing as a form of enquiry – of writing one's way through knowledge to a state of unknowing insight. The very purpose of such writing is to depart from the familiar, logocentric understanding of the work and to find new ways of knowing (Hoult, 2012, p. 17).

Whilst I see Cixous's position as somewhat idealistic in that, to some extent, by terming it *écriture feminine*, it perpetuates the binary (masculine/feminine) which she is seeking to rescind, the possibilities of espousing unconventional and metaphorical approaches to writing and research I find very exciting and have wholeheartedly embraced in this project. It also sits comfortably with heuristics. My unique take on feminine writing, in opposition to the scientistic approach, is exemplified in my use of a novel as a methodology, which I explain later in this chapter.

One of the theorists whose work I was drawn to in the early stages of this study, and whom I write about extensively in chapter four, Marion Milner (here writing using the pseudonym of Joanna Field), sums up the call to move away from patriarchal nomothetic methods of research, to validate a more creative, idiographic

and intuitive ("feminine") approach, when, in the course of introducing her own study of what makes her happy, she says:

> Most of the people I knew (both men and women) had made a cult of the 'male intellect', that is, of objective reasoning as against subjective intuition. ... [A] feminine attitude to the universe was really just as legitimate, intellectually and biologically, as a masculine one ... (Field/Milner, 1934/1986, p. 17).

Milner here conflates feminine with female and masculine with male, a now rather old-fashioned position which Cixous and later theorists moved away from as being too polarising and literal in its thinking, but, nevertheless, back in the 1930s, she was innovative in seeing the need to branch out from established methods of research and explore new horizons in enquiring into the depths of personal experience reflexively and creatively, unashamedly espousing alternative, intuitive ways of knowing that defy measurement and taxonomy. I view this as part of the feminine writing and feminine research ethos I have cultivated. Milner has been part of the inspiration behind my research, and I acknowledge her role, as well as that of Cixous, in shaping my methodology.

Like Milner I used my own reading diaries as a source of primary data (and I will elaborate on this later), but the project started off initially as a piece of conceptual research (and only later evolved to include this second, rich source of personal data), but conceptual research with a difference, or at least, as I would see it, from a ***feminine*** perspective. There is comparatively little written about conceptual research, when contrasted with the numerous tomes detailing other research methods (both nomothetic and idiographic) in the social sciences (Bazeley, 2018; Hanley, Lennie, & West, 2013; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011; Jensen & Laurie, 2016). The principal source I found for this related exclusively to conceptual research in psychoanalysis (Dreher, 2000) and I shall discuss a little later in this chapter my reasons for exploring my topic in the light of psychoanalytic perspectives, but first I elaborate on my rationale for conceptual research.

The majority of social science research today, whether quantitative or qualitative, is empirical. The emphasis is on finding new facts to incorporate into our body of knowledge, and the role that concepts play in this process is played down. Mayr (1997, p. 26, as cited in Dreher, 2000, p. 3), however, advances a valid argument in favour of the conceptual, pointing out that, if Nobel prizes were only awarded for the discovery of new facts, then not even Darwin would have qualified (even if there were a Nobel prize for biology), because natural selection is not a fact, but a concept. Of course, it is the conjunction of findings and devising a conceptual framework through which to understand/interpret them that is important, rather than either/or. "Theories are the stories we tell about the facts" (Clarkson, 1999, p. 311) and conceptual thinking is vital for advancing understanding and interpreting empirical data.

In general terms, conceptual research involves "the careful, tentatively speculative forming of hypotheses by individuals who have immersed themselves in the data currently available" (Wachtel, 1980, p. 401). It is essentially a way of reviewing current published literature on a topic and thinking it through at depth to reach new insights. As opposed to enumerative induction (which is used in empirical research), conceptual research uses intuitive induction processes, "where a series of observations is used to infer basic principles or patterns that are suspected to be an integral part of the phenomena under observation" (Dreher, 2000, p. 25). It is here, with the latter intuitive induction that the creativity and intuition of the researcher are drawn upon, and crucial to the process. Dreher continues:

> A further helpful element to this [intuitive induction method] is the formation of analogies, whereby concepts or theoretical ideas from one known area are transferred to another. Freud, as we know, borrowed many of his concepts from medicine or mythology … because he thought them expedient and meaningful in the description of psychic structures and processes (2000, pp. 25-26).

Transferring concepts from one sphere to another long predates Freud and is a familiar element in religious writings, for example the New Testament parables told by Jesus. These fictitious stories are designed to illustrate life truths; memorable

because they are told as stories, parables encapsulate mores of social living and embody moralistic ideas. Indeed, the English word *theory* is etymologically related to the Greek *theoreo*, meaning show or spectacle, from which root is also derived the word for *theatre*.

This fits with a feminine research ethos, in that creative, intuitive processes are engaged to explicate the researcher's ideas. The first, and most exciting, discovery I made was in linking the processes I intuited which were involved in immersive literary reading, to a favourite French novel, *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971). This was an entirely intuitive process, my initially being completely unconscious of any connection existing between the two. I cannot even document ***how*** I made the discovery, I simply became reminded, as I thought about the mysterious psychic place to which the reader disappears in the course of engaging with a novel, of the story of Meaulnes disappearing through the mists and visiting the *domaine étrange* (see chapter three). It was no more than a confluence of ideas as I thought about the mystery of the reading space, but as I let the ideas incubate, and I continued to play around with them in my mind, so the parallels became more apparent, and I began to see the story of *Le grand Meaulnes* as something of an analogue for the story of literary reading. This concept excited me and gained credence the more I explored both the narrative of the text and the process of immersive literary reading.

In wishing to adumbrate my process of discovery/linking here (which I realised in retrospect I could not, it being an intuitive process), I sought to find literature that would document Freud's process of linking psychosexual concepts with the stories of Oedipus and Narcissus in Greek mythology, as two of the most well-known examples. What led him to realise that there was an archetypal process here, represented in the Greek myth? As hard as I tried, I found only very oblique reference to this, his actual process of linking (in contrast to the vast literature illuminating the links themselves between Oedipal and narcissistic principles and psychoanalysis). There was a paragraph in his biography (Gay, 1988), and one

incompletely referenced article on line (Dolloff, 2006), which claimed that the ideas came to him as part of his own self-analysis and in later reflecting upon the impact that Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannus* (1982) had on (Freud's) contemporary audiences in Europe, which made him realise it was a universal phenomenon, and not just contextual to Greek mythology, as audiences found resonances to their own experiences (as he, himself, had done). Of Freud, Gay states:

> He recognized that his remembered "infatuation with the mother and jealousy of the father" was more than a private idiosyncrasy. Rather, he told Fliess, the Oedipal relationship of the child to its parents was "a general event in early childhood." He was sure, in fact, that it was an "idea of general value" that might explain "the gripping power of *Oedipus Rex*" and perhaps of *Hamlet*" (Gay, 1988, p. 100).

Freud's realisation that his own childhood feelings towards his parents were shared by humanity at large appears to be presented as a fact or observation, but nowhere is it clear how he made the mental link. In the absence of any other means of identifying Freud's process of discovering the Oedipus complex, it may be assumed to have been an unconscious connection, a tacit knowing, which occurred to him as a result of his being immersed both in reading literary fiction (the Greek myth) and in thinking about his clinical practice: an early example of conceptual research, and intuitive induction. The myth, being well-known, has come to be regarded as a short-hand way of identifying the developmental psychic processes and feelings of rivalry involved in having to accept the social situation of accommodating others, and individuals' unconscious resistance to this.

Whilst I am not claiming such a momentous, universally applicable relevance of *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971) to the experience of ***every*** reader of literary fiction as Freud averred for the Oedipus complex, I make the point that the model of applying myth/fictional literature to everyday life processes is established by none other than Freud himself, and a valid matrix through which to think about the experience of reading. Going beyond Freud, where literature was the inspiration behind theoretical thinking, I present this use of literature as a unique and innovative part of my research methodology itself.

There are precedents and similarities here, but, unlike Freud, what I am proposing is not simply analogical, but a new research methodology: that of using a novel as a way of understanding a process (in this case, the process of reading literary fiction). Alain-Fournier's *Le grand Meaulnes* (1913/1971) was the gateway which awakened in me enlightenment and understanding of the process I set out to explore. I refer to it as my ***portal*** novel for this reason, in that it opened the way to clarify my thinking and provided a way of engaging with the topic that was not simply descriptive or conceptual, but also experiential. Reading the story unlocked my understanding in a heuristic way, such that immersing myself in the novel meant I had experienced the process I was writing about before I had made the links theoretically.

My portal novel is not so much a template as, itself, a gateway to experiencing the alternative consciousness of immersive literary reading. Importantly, it ***shows*** the reader, through engagement with the novel, what the experience is like, rather than simply explaining in academic or allegorical terms that furnish cognitive understanding alone. Rather than demystifying the process, reading the novel provides an experiential metanarrative to immersive literary reading.

Research methodology: Heuristic enquiry

Coupled with the exploration of the conceptual links between the process of immersive literary reading and the story of Alain-Fournier's (1913/1971) novel, I engaged in a heuristic process of enquiry (Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2019), using myself as both participant and researcher. In Moustakas's words:

> The focus in a heuristic quest is on recreation of the lived experience; full and complete depictions of the experience from the frame of reference of the experiencing person. The challenge is fulfilled through examples, narrative descriptions, dialogues, stories, poems, artworks, journals and diaries, autobiographical logs and other personal documents (1990, p. 39).

Nevine Sultan, writing some thirty years after Moustakas, qualifies an important distinction between ***lived*** experience and ***living*** experience, the latter being her take on heuristic research, which I fully embrace in this study. Whilst ***lived*** experience, qualified by a past participle, implies that the incident is over and completed, ***living*** experience captures the sense of continuous life, where events from the past have been assimilated into the present and continue to influence the individual's process of current living. Heuristic research, therefore, is the study of "… ***living experience*** (i.e. interrelated, interconnected, continuing experience), rather than the study of ***lived experience***, which …implies that human experiences are intermittent events that are disconnected from one another and that, once completed, they are history" (Sultan, 2019, p. 4).

This was an exciting development for my own study, as my take on the experience of immersive literary reading mirrors the heuristic process in being that of a living experience, not just compartmentalised as something that a reader engages with at discrete moments in her life, and then moves away from to continue living (although that may be what happens on a physical level), but it is a living experience which affects her daily life and has the potential to transform her person in an ongoing way.

The heuristic process, then, seeks to explore a chosen life experience from the inside, using the researcher's own process of engagement with the topic, drawing on her own life perspective, tacit understandings of, and relationship with, the phenomenon. Rather than looking for answers, the researcher brings "passion, curiosity, imagination and vulnerability" (Sultan, 2019, p. 11) to the process as she immerses herself in her topic. She needs to be able to tolerate ambiguity and not knowing, whilst continuing to give herself over to her quest. Moustakas identified seven phases of heuristic research from initial engagement, through immersion, incubation, illumination, explication and creative synthesis finally to validation (Moustakas, 1990, pp. 27-34), but recognised that these occur in a fluid, creative way, rather than a conscious linear one, the processes overlapping, stalling,

reverting, interacting etc. throughout. It was through engaging in this deeply heuristic process that I discovered my portal novel. There was no deliberate intention to find an appropriate piece of literature in this capacity, it simply emerged from immersing myself in the heuristic process. Moustakas (1990) and Sultan (2019) both allude to the use of artefacts and stories as generic to the process. That I found a novel in this capacity is perhaps not surprising, engaged as I was in the literary sphere, but it could equally have been another (non-literary) object. The important point is that ***it*** found ***me*** as I engaged in the process; I did not actively seek it out.

At the start of this project, I had nothing but a vague sense of what I wanted to research, my initial thoughts being more along the lines of wanting to use literature to illuminate psychoanalytic concepts and it was only after I began engaging with reading both theoretical and fictional texts, that the question emerged. I then began to immerse myself in exploring what different thinkers, both psychoanalytic (Bion, 1962, 2007b; Bollas, 1978, 1987, 1995, 1999; Freud, 1899, 1901/2002a, 1908/2003, 1920-1922; Klein, 1930, 1958; Milner, 1950/2010, 1987b; Ogden, 1999, 2010; Ogden & Ogden, 2013; Winnicott, 1953, 1967a, 1967b, 1969, 1971), and literary (Barthes, 1975; Brooks, 1977, 1984, 1994; Felman, 1977, 1987, 2003; Holland, 1966, 1975, 1976a, 1985, 2009a, 2009b; Ricoeur, 2008; Rosenblatt, 1960, 1982, 1986, 1994), had to say about the process of reading fiction, as well as working my way through my library of classical novels.

Throughout the process I kept a journal of my reading experience: what I had felt, what I had enjoyed, what resonances/insights had emerged, where I felt disengaged (with some tentative thoughts as to why), what I had discarded and what my overall sense was anticipating picking up a particular novel, engaging with it, and finishing it. The journal was an analytic tool, not simply to document my reading experience, but also to reflect upon it in the light of my own history as well as (psychoanalytic and literary) theory. As previously mentioned, one of the principal theorists with whose work I initially engaged was Marion Milner, who (on

these occasions writing as Joanna Field), documents how she used journalling as a method of primary data collection for various pieces of research which she undertook (Field, 1934/1986, 1937/1986, 1958-59/1987), and later published.

The topics of Milner's enquiries were everyday matters, and each study evolved from the previous one to deepen her understanding of herself and who she was. Initially asking herself the question "what makes me happy" in *A life of one's own* (1934/1986), she recorded her daily experiences to enquire which were satisfying and which not, seeking to illuminate patterns of events and her emotional response to them. This led her on, in *An experiment in leisure* (1937/1986), to a more specific consideration of what to do with her spare time, and then culminated in *Eternity's sunrise* (1958-59/1987) where, by this time approaching the age of 60, she was addressing more existential questions of "who am I?" and "what do I want?". For each piece of research, spanning several years, Milner diarised her day-to-day life, and sought to draw out significant understanding from these primary data. Her books gave further credence to my decision to document my reading processes in the form of journals, and so to acquire a body of written data to form the basis of my deeper reflections on my own living experience.

In my own research process, I moved between immersing myself in literary fiction, then reflecting upon and journalling about my thoughts and feelings about the process (at times on a daily basis), at the same time as engaging with a thorough search of other theorists' writings about reading literature and the aesthetic process. These two strands of data were explored in parallel. My intention in my reading journal was to follow Moustakas's guideline to furnish a "full and complete depiction of the experience" (1990, p. 39) from my own frame of reference, omitting nothing, even if it did not tally with the direction of my developing thesis. My reading reflections incubated in the light of existing theory as well as my own emerging thinking, and I continued to immerse myself in literary fiction and document my responses over a period of several years. I read, and re-read my journal entries assiduously, seeking to inhabit and understand their import. Slowly,

sparks of illumination began to dawn; elements of the reading process became clearer, or their mystery emerged more starkly, and I began to explore what was surfacing from some of the deeper, unconscious processing taking place. I made autobiographical links with my personal history, documenting events from childhood and adult life which had been formative and were re-evoked from my readings, noting the impact on me of these resonances and transferences, and thinking about my emotional response to reading the text as a result.

The use of literary fiction: in three principal ways

My adopting *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971) as a portal novel to describe and explore the process of immersive literary reading as a piece of conceptual research, as noted above, is not the only occasion where I use a piece of literature as an analogue for the process of reading. Using literary parallels for psychic processes in this way is, however, only one of the three ways in which literary fiction features in my thesis. Additionally, I use examples from literary texts to illustrate specific processes, and I also cite particular vignettes from novels which have had a profoundly transformational effect on me. I now clarify these two elements further.

My second use of literary fiction, then, draws on specific passages from various texts, where the protagonists in the story are described in the act of reading, their behaviour and processes are documented, and their state of mind illuminated or inferred. I use literary examples of elements of the process articulated, where the characters in the novel are reading, and the authors' descriptions of what takes place captures the essence of something deeply perceptive about the process. It is not literary criticism, for my position is not to critique the use of language or juxtaposition of events, nor, indeed, to question the veracity of the narrative contents, but rather to cite passages of writing which illustrate in a far more evocative and prepossessing fashion than I could conceive, the substance of the phenomenon in question.

Several novels feature in this role, among which the principal are *Anna Karenina* (Tolstoy, 1893-1877/1999) and *To the lighthouse* (Woolf, 1927/2002). Each reader alluded to in the novel illustrates an aspect of the phenomena I am exploring and contributes to a body of evidence to illuminate the points I am making. It could be argued that fictional characters are not actual and so do not provide empirical, factual data. I would counter this by recognising firstly that this is conceptual research, and I am using the examples to illustrate and illuminate my findings, rather than claiming the veracity of the accounts *per se*. Secondly, I cite Freud again, who, himself, "… quoted Goethe's *Faust* to convey an impression of his mental state" (Gay, 1988, p. 99), finding the words of the text more evocative and expressive of what he wanted to convey than his own straightforward language. Indeed, Freud declared an "… appreciation of the subtleties and the wisdom which our great poets and teachers have put into their writings …" (Freud, 1892, p. 20), and I am subsuming novelists also into the category of poets here. He preferred their understanding to that of the so-called "hard" scientists: "… it is high time to drive lawyers and doctors out of a world that belongs to thinkers and poets" (Freud, 1910b, p. 162). Indeed, in 1926 at the time of his seventieth birthday celebrations, Freud publicly recognised the wisdom of the artistic minds of authors and philosophers, disclaiming the honour being attributed to him of having discovered the unconscious, and countering that "… the poets and philosophers before me discovered the unconscious; what I discovered was the scientific method by which the unconscious can be studied" (Trilling, 1940, p. 152). His daughter, Anna, also concurred, recognising:

> Poets are renowned for knowing almost as much of unconscious motivation as do analysts or successfully analyzed persons. Even though their insight is not always directed toward their own psychic processes, it is most impressive with regard to the figures they invent (Freud, A., 1981, p. 248).

That aesthetic writers present insightful description and commentary on matters of everyday life aligns with my position and inclusion of extracts from literature in this way, therefore, seems an eminently suitable medium through which to explore these phenomena.

A third way in which literature is used in this thesis is where I cite vignettes from a variety of novels I have read over the course of my research which have featured in my reading journal and stand out as having had a transformational influence on me personally. This is where the autoethnographic elements of the research come into play, as I specify links between the fiction in question and my own life story and document the impact of these readings on me. I explicate the resonances with my own history and show how I was profoundly touched by my reading experiences, and on many occasions, came to a new understanding and healing came to previously painful parts of my life.

The stories and excerpts featured in this way are varied and unpredictable, as I was on many occasions surprised by the connections that emerged in the course of my reading. It was not always an identification with a hero or heroine, but an aspect of his/her life that might bring something from my own history into stark relief, or I would unexpectedly find a transference to a particular situation which evoked memories and feelings and took me deeply into previously unconscious places. There is no formula or neat explanation for any of the texts quoted in this third way, but each tells a powerful story in its own right. Literature is used in this manner to furnish specific illustrations from my own experience of my conclusion that immersive literary reading can be a generative, transformational experience and is of far greater psychic importance for the reader than simply a leisure activity providing a diversion from everyday life (though it is that), but has the potential for greater, life-changing value. My deduction is that the process itself of reading literary texts provides a matrix within which the reader is able to access previously unconscious aspects of the self. By virtue of being fully engaged in an alternative fictional world, conscious censorship of the self is lifted, and the reader can connect with parts of her experience that she normally represses. The several examples that I cite in the following chapters form a substantive body of evidence for this claim, and, along with my reading journal, are part of my primary data source.

The idea that I started playing with, of going through a sort of veil into a different kind of consciousness, opens up a new world to the reader, and raises questions about levels and qualities of awareness. This leads me to clarify my choice of drawing on ideas and concepts from psychoanalysis as a key part of the exploration of the psychodynamics of immersive literary reading, which I now explain.

The unconscious connection

Psychoanalysis is essentially about seeking to understand unconscious processes, and what happens beneath the surface of observable human interactions. Having already a basic knowledge of psychoanalytic theory when I approached this research, I was versed in ideas and concepts generic to the discipline, and not a stranger to the belief that human beings have unconscious thoughts and desires which drive their behaviour, over and above external, socialised conventions. Through my years of training as a therapist, I had encountered the work of Freud (1900, 1901, 1905b, 1909/1962, 1912a, 1915b, 1915-1917/1973, 1920-1922), Klein (1928, 1930, 1940, 1975), Bion (1961, 1962, 1963, 1970), Winnicott (1949, 1958, 1960, 1967a, 1969), and many of the heroes of psychoanalysis, and developed a fascination for exploring unconscious life and motivations. I was curious to think about this in connection with the process of immersive literary reading, as I had intuited that there may be links to be made which would be helpful.

As stated earlier, I believe I had made an unconscious link between the story of *Le grand Meaulnes* and my own experience of immersive literary reading long before it ever became a conscious association. When, as a schoolgirl, I found myself enchanted to read of Augustin's expedition into the mists of the *domaine étrange*, I believe that I was making an unconscious link to my own enjoyment of the mysteries of the journey of reading a literary text, long before I recognised the conjunction of the two processes. As any good analyst, when considering countertransference responses to client work, would do, I took my unconscious thinking to be in advance of my conscious thinking (Heimann, 1950), and, rather

than dismissing it as an interesting, but possibly irrelevant, phantasy, embraced it as a meaningful unconscious communication that had come to consciousness in a timely manner, because I was immersing myself in the research process, and open to tacit ways of knowing to bring to bear on my research methodology.

It is, I suggest, appropriate for a study that incorporates an exploration of unconscious as well as conscious processes, that unconscious factors are also recognised in the methodology itself. I did not initially actively set out to explore links between literary reading and psychoanalysis, but I believe I had made an unconscious connection between the two disciplines, and so was drawn, by a tacit form of knowing, to think about the unconscious processes involved in reading.

Exploration of the impact of the unconscious on the reading process invites links with psychoanalytic thought, and I had already drawn on my unconscious sense of connection between the two disciplines. A second, and equally compelling, reason for incorporating psychoanalytic theory into the research, however, is the fact that psychoanalysis is, itself, essentially all about reading, not the kind of literary reading that is the subject of my thesis, perhaps, but reading nonetheless: the reading of people. I wanted to explore links between these two types of reading, and, again, I had not explicitly thought this through at the time of deciding on a methodology, but was guided by an intuitive sense that "reading" encapsulates far more than deciphering signs on a page, and that it was to an exploration of the emotional, relational aspects of reading to which I was attracted. Freud, as an avid reader particularly of the works of Goethe and Schiller (Gay, 1988), converted some of his understandings from literature into psychoanalytic theory to become a reader of people. Making links between a patient's personal history and her here-and-now presentation in the therapy requires a sophisticated type of reading which involves the analyst using herself and her own experience of the patient in the room as well as her memory of the narrative that has been brought. Drawing on awareness of her countertransference responses requires a valuing of tacit ways of knowing and recognition that far more is happening in any

human transaction than is obvious from the overt dialogue. It is a reading which requires the engagement of the whole person of the analyst/reader.

Winnicott (1967b, 1969) wrote about the most primitive form of reading being that of the infant reading the mother[3]'s face, the emotional impact of the cues interpreted from it determining the nuances of the attachment relationship, how the child developed and subsequently shaped her personality. This type of reading pre-dates literacy. It is, however, I have found, an important part of the immersive literary reading process, which draws on the reader's ability to intuit affect and draws on her capacity to read into the psyches of the characters in the novel.

Literary fiction is a genre of writing which aims to engage the emotion of the reader. It is not just about telling a story, it is the way the story is told; evocative descriptions are designed to stir memories, evince nostalgia, arouse passions, longings etc. It also draws on the reader's ability to read the characters presented in the story, consider clues to their behaviour, and intuit their unconscious motivations and desires. These are respects in which literary fiction differs from historical accounts. Although words are the medium through which the reader is engaged, her non-verbal responses are equally important. The reader reads ***into*** the textual descriptions of characters in her novel (Knights, 1995), eliciting clues to the emotional state of the protagonists over and above that which is elucidated explicitly by the author. It is these phenomena that are the subject of my enquiry. I am not concerned with the mechanics of reading but rather with the nature of the reader's emotional and psychical engagement with the text, the ***reading in*** to the literary work, and here is where exploration of psychoanalytic concepts may help to enlighten. I am not claiming that there is comparability in every aspect of the process of immersive literary reading, but I do believe that psychoanalytic ideas provide a good place to start thinking about it.

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[3] In drawing on concepts from the early psychoanalytic writers Freud, Klein, Bion, Winnicott and Bowlby et al., I retain their terminology of "mother" etc., in order to preserve the integrity of ideas, but I use the terms in a broader metaphorical sense, not tied to gender or any sexist notions associated with them.

To harmonise with the nature and topic of my research, my methodology needed to embrace both observable and tacit forms of knowing, drawing on both my cognitive, conceptual skills and emotional engagement as the reader/researcher. Just as an analyst's reading of her patient says as much or more about the analyst herself as it does about the other/patient, so the literary reader's reading says as much about the reader as it does about the text (although, in both cases, it is about a dynamic intersubjective relationship between the two – which I explore in chapter six). My research and my research methodology are intensely personal and reveal, perhaps, as much about me as about the process in general. I come now, in concluding this chapter, to consider my own investment in this piece of research.

My investment in the research

Conventional methods of research, both quantitative and qualitative, work with conscious data. The analysis of questionnaires or interview data starts from the position that the information provided by participants is, to the best of their ability, their truth, the assumption being that interviewees respond honestly and frankly from their bank of memories and that their reminiscences are an accurate recall. This is a questionable supposition, as it neither takes into account the impact on memory of the passage of time, nor, importantly, the interplay of psychic processes and ego defences. Interviewers tend to take at face value what their participants say, working only with overt data, rather than focusing on what might have been omitted from a narrative, or that what is stated might have been sanitised or presented in a socially acceptable way for any number of reasons (the interviewee might be protecting herself from embarrassing or shameful revelations; might be invested in coming across a particular way, with a certain point to make; might be protecting the interviewer from uncomfortable data; etc.). These defences are likely to be semi-, if not completely, unconscious (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000).

Omitting these data, however, ultimately presents a skewed picture of the findings, and whilst unconscious data (by virtue of the fact that they are

unconscious) can only be surmised or inferred from a deeper consideration of any individual's wider discourse around a particular topic, I believe it is important at least to acknowledge their presence, and make some attempt to get underneath the narrative. Holloway and Jefferson (2000) and West (1994, 1996) present compelling arguments for the fact that research is incomplete, and findings distorted, unless a fuller picture of participants' broader narratives is taken into account. In line with a postmodern ethos, individual context is seen as a vital factor in understanding research findings. There needs to be recognition that individuals are "… invested in particular positions in discourses to protect vulnerable aspects of the self … and … are motivated, largely unconsciously, to disguise the meaning of at least some … feelings and actions" (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 26).

As both researcher and participant in this study, to make deeper sense of some of my findings and conclusions, I felt it important to engage in a profoundly reflexive process to try to fathom some of my unconscious motivations and meanings, to uncover both my personal and social discourses around the process of reading literary fiction, or at least the discourses I espoused when I began the study. My social position started to emerge as I asked myself some searching questions. I recognised that I embraced a probably typical middle-class discourse about literary reading being a respectable past time, preferable, for example, to watching television (which was not something we did very much when I was growing up). Reading, in my family of origin, was equated with self-improvement, and a familiarity with the classics of English literature showed good breeding and good education, both of which I wished to demonstrate.

I engaged in a process of self-dialogue, often utilised in heuristic enquiry (Moustakas, 1990), and analysed my research diaries to seek to elicit some of my previously unconscious beliefs and motivations and some of these findings were uncomfortable. West recognises: "It would be easier to retreat into emasculated, sanitised, rationalised safety [and avoid scrutinising exposing elements of my own

personal process], except ragged edges are the basis for our individual and collective growth" (1994, p. 193), and it felt important not to shy away from this reflexive process, because "… the unconscious is the domain of drives, wishes and inchoate potential" (West, 1994, p. 194), and engaging with this dimension opens up possibilities and depth which would otherwise be precluded.

Throughout this research I reiterate my love of reading and, indeed, this is generally true, but, as I engaged in self-dialogue exercises, I owned that there were also times when I did ***not*** enjoy reading, times when I wished to hurry to the end of a book, just to be able to say I had read it. I acknowledged that there were also books in the canon of English literature that I had never read but was quite ashamed to admit I had never read them. I identified an investment in being seen to be a literary reader, construing it as something desirable and superior to other pursuits like sports. I recognised an elite mentality here, that certain texts were more desirable (highbrow) than others. Although in the sixth form at school I enjoyed reading Agatha Christie novels, I would read them in French, which somehow had an edge over reading them in English. I would eschew much modern fiction as being poorly written and return to the classics, which felt opulent and anyway more pleasurable. I did genuinely enjoy Dickens and Austen over Donna Tartt or Rachel Joyce but am aware that I also had a social investment in being seen to do so and would happily align myself with a liberal humanistic view of literature (Eagleton, 2008), which esteemed good literature as timeless and intrinsically valuable in its own right, irrespective of context.

Along with this social discourse, what emerged as I looked deeper (through self-dialogue and analysis of my reading journals) was the personal position around reading which I embraced. This was somewhat harder to fathom but as I drilled down, I came to recognise that selecting this topic for my research would legitimise my desire to spend time reading novels, and, in particular, many of those which I had ***not*** read in my youth. To have to journal my experience of reading literary fiction in order to complete this PhD gave me a *carte blanche* almost to immerse

myself in the reading of literary fiction. I had the perfect excuse to work my way through the canon of English literature as well as some French and Russian novels. At a deeper level still, what then emerged was that in some ways I saw this as making up for lost time. I recognised that this had a poignant link with the growing awareness of my ageing process and the sense I felt of life/time running out. I did not want to waste what time was left to me (perhaps in part because I felt I ***had*** wasted some of my earlier education opportunities). I wanted to make sure I did not miss out before it was too late. This may be the last educational project with which I engage, and I did not want to squander the time on something that was not personally profound. It is, perhaps, not accidental that the final year of my PhD coincided with my last year at work before retirement. I wanted my swansong to be meaningful. Whilst at the time of initially embarking on the research, I was unaware of these discourses and motivations, they were clearly influencing my choice of topic and how I approached the project. As he discovered in his seminal longitudinal study of learners' motivations in returning to education, West (1996) points out: "… stories evolve over time. What people have to tell of their motives and their lives more generally is never complete" (p. 10). He found a fuller picture emerging of each of his participants' narratives only over the process of years of research and dialogue with them. My understanding of my unconscious process was similarly incremental, and my deeper motivations and investment in this particular research study gradually became clearer over the years, as I continued to reflect and engage in self-dialogue and analysis of my journal findings.

A more deeply unconscious layer that shed more light upon my perspective and motivation to undertake this project emerged only in the final stages of the process, in dialogue with my supervisor. This ultimately heralded quite a shocking revelation: that my enjoyment of reading really was itself an ego defence, and ***it was defending me from living***. I discuss this more fully in my concluding remarks (chapter nine) making links to Steiner's (1993) concept of psychic retreat and considering the purpose this might have served me in avoiding life. I note this now to demonstrate the power of the heuristic part of this research. Through rigorous

self-examination of my experience of immersive literary reading, tacit understanding emerged, bringing life-changing insight, not all of which has been comfortable to acknowledge.

Critique of methodology:

The richness of heuristic enquiry is found in its depth of exploration and evocative, nuanced description of a significant experience. Because it is intensely personal to the researcher, the potential exists for a more compelling narrative with heightened awareness than would generally be the case. Indeed, such profound portrayal as is the province of heuristics, would "tend to be beyond the reach of other methodologies" (McLeod, 2011, p. 217), and herein lies its greatest advantage. McLeod avers that:

> The assumption that underpins heuristic research is that the passionate involvement of the researcher will enable a depth of sustained examination of a topic that will go beyond what could be achieved through mere use of methods of enquiry associated with phenomenology (2011, p. 206)

The intention behind my choice of methodology reflected this desire to engage at a deep level with my topic and to find a forum which accommodated this highly individual narrative style. By combining heuristics with conceptual research, I sought, additionally, to enhance this with the necessary academic rigour which can sometimes be compromised in heuristic writing.

One of the disadvantages of this methodology, however, relates to the question of the identity of the researcher, who is, necessarily a student and academic. The breadth of data which might be gleaned from interviewing a cross section of participants is, therefore, forfeited, and the findings might not be representative of marginalised groups or those from a different demographic. Being both researcher and researched, heuristic research may become simply a dialogue between different parts of the writer, as she draws upon her experiencing self and her reflective/thinking self in order to make sense of the data, and this may

seem to be solipsistic and raises the question of relevance to her readers. I reflect on this issue a little further in my postscript, as something to be addressed, possibly in future studies designed to corroborate or dispute my findings.

A further area to problematise is also the question of authenticity. How open is the author to exploring possible unconscious aspects of herself, and what is she unwittingly selecting to withhold from her portrayal of the research (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000; West, 1994, 1996)? I have tried to take a disarmingly honest look at my own investment in this research, asking myself some searching questions about motives and what I might be wishing to portray, but realise that, no matter how rigorously I attend to this, as a subject it is impossible to be ruthlessly objective, so cite it as a limitation

Chapter two: Introduction to the psychodynamics of immersive literary reading

"The shapes taken by stories and the reasons for their telling suggest the need to explore more fully the narrative situation … and the kinds of reaction and understanding that narratives appear to want to elicit" (Brooks, 1984, p. 216).

In this chapter, I introduce the key concepts of my thesis (which are addressed more fully in subsequent chapters) and present preliminary discussion about the process of immersive literary reading in the light of the writings of my principal theorists and other extant literature.

After a brief allusion to some recent research which substantiates the power of the impact of the text on readers of fiction, I conclude that the connection between text and reader may best be described as symbiotic, and explore the intersubjective nature of the relationship, and the active/passive, conscious/unconscious dimensions of the enterprise. Attention will then focus on the role of the frame in providing a matrix within which the process takes place. This leads me to discussion of the work of Norman Holland (1975, 1985, 1998, 2009a, 2009b) on reader response theory, and the prerequisites of the willing suspension of disbelief in approaching a work of fiction, and how this, combined with the physical inertia of the reader, enables her to enter a regressed, oral state in which she can merge with the text and experience it as if **s**he were a protagonist rather than an observer. I introduce a key point in my thesis: that the reader immersed in literary fiction, at the same time as occupying this primitive psychic space where boundaries between herself and her text merge, also engages sophisticated literacy and symbolic skills, such that her mental position might be characterised as what I am terming ***sophisticated paranoid schizoid***[4]. In further opening up the ***sophisticated*** part of this paradoxical mind set, I consider the importance of evocation and literary language, as well as the role of the plot in engaging the reader's attention throughout, and introduce the work of Knights (1995) about the uniqueness of literary language, in conjunction with some thoughts

[4] Developing Klein's (1958, 1975) ideas of the paranoid schizoid position

from developmental psychology, and in particular the writings of Gertraud Diem-Wille (2011), on the importance of exaggeration as a tool in this process. Finally, I bring some initial thoughts on the therapeutic and transformational potential of immersive literary reading, starting from its function in articulating the previously ineffable or the unthought known (Bollas, 1987) and facilitating enlightenment and what Hellenga (1982) describes as "seeing through other eyes".

Introduction

Although it is beyond the scope of this research to explore the neuroscientific links between brain activity and reading, focusing as I am on internal mental states and psychoanalytic theories of the mind, acknowledgement must be made of the exciting neuropsychological possibilities that literary reading affords, in physically corroborating some of my findings. Both the work of Norman Holland (1975, 2009b), to which I refer later, and the writings of Allan Schore (1997, 2002), who overlapped with Bowlby and took forward his theory of the central part played by attachment in mental life, elucidate the effects on the brain (and right brain hemisphere in particular) of the experience of activities such as reading. A recent (2011) neuroscience study undertaken in the United States by Prof Gregory Berns, designed to explore the effects on the brain of reading a novel, drew the conclusion that the part of the brain that normally prepares the body to run once it has thought about running, was shown to demonstrate heightened activity in the process of reading, suggesting that the research participants were responding ***as if*** they had been players in the story, and not simply observers. Berns et al. conclude: "It is plausible that the act of reading a novel places the reader in the body of the protagonist…" (2013, pp. 598-599). That actual neural changes occur in the act of reading scientifically validates the powerful experience of the reader engaged in the activity. Schore (1997) advocates the overlap of psychoanalytic and neuroscientific disciplines in considering a rapprochement which had previously eluded Freud (1895), and an interesting parallel line of enquiry to my own research, would be to explore further the links with neuroscience. However, it neither answers the question why, nor illuminates the unconscious processes that produce in the brain

parallel responses in this way. Clearly a complex relationship exists between reader and text, and I proceed now to highlight some of the facets of this.

Intersubjective relationship between reader and text

French social scientist and psychoanalyst, Michel De Certeau asserts in somewhat pejorative terms, that: "[r]eaders are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves" (1984, p. 174). The charge that the reader is an unwelcome predator, misappropriating the creativity of another for her own ends is a stark comment, and yet, I have found, carries an element of truth, as the reader uses the carefully crafted words of the text and formulates them in her imagination into her own creation as she reads. I discuss in greater depth in chapter three the question of this possessive and potentially parthenogenetic aspect of the relationship. Davies (though writing more specifically of literary criticism rather than reading itself) embellishes the theme to describe: "descending into the underworld of the text with a view to ***wrenching*** some kind of transferable essence from it" (2013, p. 223, italics mine). The implication might be inferred that the text is intended to remain sacrosanct, in its virgin form, away from the prying eyes of reader or critic, who may desecrate it and yet, in truth, the relationship might better be described more as symbiotic than parasitic, for without the reader, the text is inert. It exists for the very purpose of being read.

Much as the Old Testament prophet Ezekiel, confronted with a valley of skeletal remains (Ezekiel, ch. 37 v 1-3) recognises that the dry bones cannot live unless they have the breath of life breathed into them (Jerusalem Bible, 1968, p. 1215) so, until it comes together with the active engagement of a responsive reader, a text is a lifeless form only, literally and metaphorically a closed book, whose pages contain the configurations of script, but from which vitality is absent. It comes alive only within the psyche of the reader, and lives on solely as it metabolises in her. "It is impossible to discover a situation in which a text can be observed without an

observer (a reader) being present" (Crosman, 1982, p. 212). The two are inextricably linked and have no independent existence outside of each other. "One cannot maintain the division separating the readable text ... from the act of reading. Whether it is a question of newspapers or Proust, the text has a meaning only through its readers; it changes along with them ..." (De Certeau, 1984, pp. 170-171). A reader is only a reader at the point of reading; the text is inert unless it finds vitality in the psyche of the reader. "Roland Barthes stresses that narrative is always contractual, based upon an implicit or explicit promise of exchange between teller and listener ... an act of transmission and reception" (Brooks, 1994, p. 51). The text needs the reader; the reader desires the text. The first point, therefore, is clear: there is no literary reading divorced from a reader and a text. They must be in synergetic relationship before reading can happen.

The second point, which I discuss in depth in chapter six, is about the ***nature*** of the relationship between reader and text, which I conclude may best be described as intersubjective. Reading is not simply a question of passive introjection of a static narrative (Charles, 1977; De Certeau, 1984; Poland, 2003; Davies, 2013), but the interplay between text and reader takes on a unique form in each reader's experience, depending on her subjectivity and particular transferences to the text (which may be different at different readings). "Reading is an integration of the active - the purposeful, the transforming - and the passive - the receptive and reactive" (Haussamen, 1995, p. 379).

Not all theorists embrace this position, as evidenced by Cooper, who writes (1982) of his work with Columbia College undergraduates in New York, exploring their experiences of particular literary texts and comparing the meanings attributed by each individual to the written narrative. He relates an occasion when he had been pleased to invite to be present in class the author of the work under consideration. In listening to their free associations, however, the author emphatically told the students they were wrong about his characters. For the

author, there was a singular, intended exegesis, whereas for the readers, a rich multitude of variants, bearing out the point that each reading is idiosyncratic.

Another experiment was undertaken by literary critic Robert Crosman (1982), whereby he and one of his students each read William Faulkner's (1930/1990) short story *A rose for Emily* and then wrote down their impressions and responses. Of striking impact was that each had very dissimilar views on the intriguing narrative, he focusing on the escalation of feelings of disgust which culminated in the horror of the discovery of necrophilia and a primary sense of revulsion, while for the other reader, evocations of her childhood and her grandmother had formed a much more benign and wistful response. He concluded that "all literary texts are by nature ambiguous, and ... the reader makes their meaning" (Crosman, 1982, p. 212).

Literary critic Esman concurs with these sentiments, asserting: "readers bring to the text more, that is, than their fantasies; they bring their total personalities to the reading task, and thus to suggest that there is a single right or wrong way of reading a text is a prescriptive position that ignores the diversity of human attitudes or motives" (1982, p. 19). Whilst the reader is not rewriting the story told, she is imputing her own understanding and connections to make it meaningful for her (De Certeau, 1984). My conclusion is that each reading is unique, as every reader overlays her own interpretations and associations to the text. This requires dynamic engagement, the reader being far from passive (Charles, 1977). Davies, too, poses the question: "... [t]o what degree can we even begin to speak of a text simply "happening" to us? Can readers ever be anything less than active?" (2013, p. 224). The reader is psychically active, and " ... what is taken in is not swallowed whole; it is selectively chewed over and only then digested" (Poland, 2003, p. 1267). Milner captures the tension and combines the two polar positions to refer to an attitude of "actively receptive passivity" (Sayers, 2002, p. 108).

An understanding of the reader's capacity to create her own representations of the *dramatis personae* and rewrite the themes she draws from literary narrative might also usefully be linked to another key element in my thesis: that the reader adopts a regressed psychic state in her reading (which will be discussed later in connection with the willing suspension of disbelief). It is worth noting here, however, that the narcissistic phase of development which encapsulates the orality attributed to it, is characterised by illusions of omnipotence and phantasies of the infant's own influence in object relating, (prior to being able to engage in object usage proper), so that she effectively creates the world and her understanding of the Other after her own image (Tyson & Tyson, 1990; Waddell, 2002). Lost in this equivalent regressed state of fantasy, the reader also accesses her own narcissistic, creative capacity, and so imbues the fiction with overlays of her own innovation, rewriting it, too, after ***her*** own image. I discuss further in chapter six my theory that in the process of reading, the reader psychically engages in a reversal of the normal developmental process, moving from a position of object usage back to the object relations stage (Winnicott, 1969), where the others in the story are fashioned in her mind in line with her own imagination.

Haussamen writes of the fallacy that "there is a kind of reading in which the reader does not do anything except absorb words and information" (1995, p. 379), and De Certeau comments disparagingly of the misapprehension of "low level" journalism or television, in arrogating that

> … the public is moulded by the products imposed on it. To assume that is to misunderstand the act of "consumption". This misunderstanding assumes that "assimilating" necessarily means "becoming similar to" what one absorbs, and not "making something similar" to what one is, making it one's own, appropriating and reappropriating it (De Certeau, 1984, p. 166).

I am taking the position that it is not a question of involuntary ingestion, but a dynamic two-way transaction, where the reader brings herself to her reading, thus: "[e]very aesthetic reading of a text is a unique creation, woven out of the inner life and thought of the reader" (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 277). Each reader of a literary text

finds in it chronicles of the recurring patterns of her own life and identity, and sees therein reflections of her own themes, in a more dynamic and complex, and yet similar, way to the unique interpretations individuals attribute to inkblot tests. Just as many of the processes of digestion may be regarded as reflex responses, and yet the act of eating itself requires the active engagement of the devourer in biting and masticating, so, I suggest, the reader is actively consuming and modifying that which she reads, employing both conscious and unconscious processes in the task. The alimentary metaphor extends also to the fact that it is the initial stages of the process (putting in the mouth, biting, chewing) that require a physically active stance, but that once the bolus has been swallowed, instinctive digestive processes take over. This mirrors the reader actively picking up her book, bringing her eyes to bear on the page and reading the words in a conscious way, but then allowing her unconscious mind to process the narrative and evocations contained in it.

Norman Holland, who has written extensively on the subject of literary response over the last fifty or more years, revised his (1975) thinking of reading simply as introjection, to adopt in 2009 "a later, wiser view: [that] the reader tests hypotheses against the text" (Holland, 2014, personal email communication). These hypotheses are referred to by Lichtenstein (1977) as "identity themes". "We are each constantly doing new things, yet we stamp each new thing with the same personal style as our earlier actions ... we actively transact literature so as to re-create our identities" (Holland, 1998, pp. 2-3). In Freud's somewhat humorous, though more caustic words of nearly a century earlier: "[w]e have no difficulty in recognizing His Majesty the Ego, the hero of ... every novel" (Freud, 1908/2003, p. 30).

The distinctive factor in any one reading, *ergo*, is the reader. "One literature differs from another less by its text than by the way in which it is read" (Borges, 1966, p. 123), the reader being the variable, the book itself being described as: "a system of verbal or iconic signs ... to which the reader must give a meaning" (De Certeau, 1984, p. 169). The reader is not a blank slate, passively introjecting the text, she lends her own unique perspective, shaped by her past, her predispositions and

identity themes. "What matters ultimately is the reader's experience, transforming the words taken in into an emotional engagement ... " (Poland, 2003, p. 1270).

I discovered that a powerful exchange takes place between the reader, absorbed in the literary text, and its ability to seduce, excite, inspire, and intrigue her, and that at the end of the encounter the reader may be transformed. "... If we really read, we fall into a story's zone or affect; we are written and rewritten by it in some way" (Monchy, 2002, p. 209). Something of a paradox emerges here, in that the reader must allow herself to fall under the spell of the text, and yet be alive to the experience of it, actively bringing her own particular understandings to it. I discuss more fully in chapter four this paradox of letting go and omnipotence, and how, in losing herself in her text, the reader may also find herself. Equally, as the reader modifies the text by superimposing her own unique interpretation on it, it is also true that "every reading modifies its object" (Charles, 1977, p. 83), and I explore in chapter seven, this phenomenon of the transformation of the reader. I move now to consider how it might be that a reader might lose herself in a text, and specifically think about the frame of mind with which she approaches the occupation.

The frame and the willing suspension of disbelief

It was noted earlier that "aesthetic reading, by its very nature, has an intrinsic purpose, the desire to have a pleasurable, interesting experience for its own sake" (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 275). This teleology, therefore, has a profound effect on the manner in which a literary text is approached by its reader. She reads to be entertained. She is seeking a pleasurable experience, to enjoy it. Coincident with that awareness is one of the fundamental prerequisites of reading fiction: the reader's willingness to "suspend disbelief", a term first coined by Coleridge (1817, n.p.), in connection with his own poetry, whereby the reader allows herself temporarily to enter into another state of consciousness outside of the environment of her everyday reality. The reader approaches the work of literary fiction with a predetermined desire to enter the world of make believe, and in full knowledge that what she will read is a fabricated story. She wants to be enthralled, to be fascinated,

and can only do this because she knows what she is reading is not real. "Pleasure reading is a form of play. It is free activity standing outside ordinary life; it absorbs the player completely … and takes place within circumscribed limits of place and time" (Nell, 1988, p. 7).

I see these delineated limits as providing the matrix which facilitates access to an alternative psychic space, what psychoanalysts might align with the frame. What takes place within the frame is distinct from life outside it.

> A frame divides up space. And … it draws attention to whatever lies within its boundaries. ... [T]he frame is saying, 'This is a representation; it is conditioned'. In other words, a frame draws attention to the artificial nature of what we see. ... When we become aware of this kind of framing, the image has been shifted to another level: it now inhabits a different space, the space of signs, a representational space (Leader, 2008, pp. 101-102).

The willing suspension of disbelief also, therefore, pertains within a clearly defined frame, and is endemic only in the context of the reading of fiction (or attending the theatre/cinematic arts). As soon as the reader steps out of the frame, by raising her eyes from the page, either to attend to some external intrusion, or even to reflect upon what she is reading, she reunites, albeit possibly only momentarily, with her everyday, rational, thinking self. The frame and the willing suspension of disbelief are both part of the door through which the reader steps wittingly into the world of fiction.

Holland (1975) illustrates the different ways in which a reader approaches non-fiction and fiction, by reproducing a paragraph ostensibly from an historical report, and asking his readers to consider their response, which he anticipates to be a questioning of the veracity of the account. When, a few paragraphs later, he reveals that the quotation was, in fact, taken from fiction, readers (myself included) experience first-hand a change in their attitude to the text. " ... Our responses to the two genres differ sharply ... it is the expectation we bring to the paragraph that determines the degree to which we will test it against our everyday experience"

(Holland, 1975, p. 68). He continues: "It is precisely our conscious knowledge that we are dealing with unreality that makes it possible for us to relax, to suspend our disbelief, and in a way to respond to the unreality as though it were real" (p. 68). The reader deliberately puts herself into the realm of fiction, and, aware of that context, willingly allows herself to put reality on hold and enter into the story as if she were part of it. One might have expected the opposite reaction to pertain. It would make rational sense to suggest that a reader might identify more readily with real-life characters from history and preserve an emotional distance from the creatures of fiction, they being merely pretend. The key, I suggest, lies in the nature of the regression experienced by the reader of literature, facilitated by the willing suspension of disbelief. I discuss this a little later in this chapter, in connection with my theory of what I term the ***sophisticated paranoid schizoid*** position, but first there are other factors to consider which are part of the frame.

Physical inertia

Another important question arises: what is it that enables the reader to enjoy a narrative that arouses fear or distress, whereas, were she confronted with a similar situation in real life, the experience would be far from pleasurable? Freud terms these: "the many excitations that are in themselves painful but can give pleasure to the writer's audience" (1908/2003, p. 26). The answer appears to lie in large part in the fact that, whilst not psychically passive in the experience of reading, the reader's ***external stance is inactive***. Back in 1900, Freud noted the connection between the physical inactivity of sleep facilitating regression into the fantasy world of dreams.

> In Hildebrandt's 1875 book about dreams, which Freud cites with approval (1900/1968, pp. 9, 67), he writes that when we fall asleep, our whole being, with all its forms of existence, "disappears, as it were, through an invisible trapdoor". This is also the experience of the ludic reader, who sinks "through clamorous pages into soundless dreams" (Gass, 1972, p. 27).

This physical inertia which facilitates the altered state of dreaming, pertains also, I maintain, for the reader absorbed in literary fiction, which I discuss further in chapter five.

Freud, further, surmises that: "the literary work ... is a continuation of, and a substitute for, the earlier play of childhood" (Freud, 1908/2003, p. 32), and of play, Winnicott writes:

> To get to the idea of playing it is helpful to think of the ***preoccupation*** that characterizes the playing of a young child. The content does not matter. What matters is the near-withdrawal state, akin to the ***concentration*** of older children and adults. The playing child inhabits an area that cannot be easily left, nor can it easily admit intrusions (Winnicott, 1971, p. 51).

The absorption of the reader taken up with a work of literary fiction demands this level of attentiveness in order to inhabit the parallel universe of the text. With its enchantment and fantasy, the pretend world of a child's play provides an important medium for addressing realities, as the literary text does for the reader, the nature of the play or the novel in question being secondary to the ***process*** of being engrossed in it, and it is this ***state of being immersed*** in reading that is so vital to the endeavour.

Being fully absorbed in literary fiction, complemented by the physical inertia necessary to maintain the immersion, I conclude, takes the reader back into an early undifferentiated state, similar to that of the infant in the oral phase of development before she is able to distinguish between inner and outer reality, or, indeed, self and other. Holland paraphrases the Bible: "except ye become as little children, ye shall not enter the kingdom of literature" (1975, p. 80). This mental state permits blissful merger with the text, much as the babe-in-arms perceives herself one with her mother and the environment. Being totally immersed in reading in this way facilitates letting go of egoic concerns and facilitates the reader's capacity to become one with what she reads. These ideas are discussed further in chapter four.

Without the willingness to suspend disbelief, to allow herself to be engrossed and overtaken by the narrative, the reader will be unable to enjoy literary

fiction, or benefit from transformation in the process, much like the patient undergoing hypnosis has voluntarily to give herself over to the unconscious state. If she resists, intent upon retaining conscious control, she will be unable to enter the altered awareness necessary for a hypnotic trance. This abandonment to the other is a prerequisite for the pleasure of fiction. Freud writes: "… the real enjoyment of a literary work derives from the relaxation of tensions in our minds" (Freud, 1908/2003, p. 33), and, while I believe that this is only a part of the reason for the reader's pleasure (and my findings show that it is far more than that), I see it as an important contributor to the process.

Flaubert, in ***Madame Bovary,*** recounting the experience of Charles Bovary after the death of his wife, Emma, writes of the powerful properties of engaging in total absorption, telling how " ... he lost himself in a contemplation so deep that it was no longer painful" (1993, p. 208). This is the kind of engrossment that I discovered is possible when engaged in reading a text, such that the reader is no longer sensible to external realities and is one with her novel. Her real-life anxieties and preoccupations are (temporarily) no longer relevant at that point of absorption.

I explore in detail in chapter five a literary example from *Anna Karenina* (Tolstoy, 1873-1877/1999, p. 98) of the opposite phenomenon, where the eponymous heroine's psychic restlessness precludes her attaining the requisite reverie to be able to read satisfactorily. Holland summarises: "[t]o be active in the inner world, we must be passive toward the outer, for action binds us to reality; inaction lets us lapse into our most primitive method of gratification" (1975, p. 74). With "action" I would include also external preoccupation, or, in other words, the contemplation of action, as a further exclusion. In his later (2009b) paper, Holland clarifies also the links between physical stasis and regression and the concomitant suspension of the brain's faculty for reality-testing, noting the latter as "also related to ***planning*** movement and action" (2009b, p. 3, italics mine). He clarifies: "To intend to act, to plan a movement, we imagine the outcome" (p. 4). Implicit, therefore, in the

inhibition of movement whilst reading, is also an interruption of the capacity even to contemplate action.

Coincident with this, *ergo*, is the recognition that the brain is no longer distinguishing between real and unreal, fact and fiction. The reader enters the world of her literary work ***as if*** it were reality and ***as if*** she were participating therein. Thus, she emotes as she would, were she to be experiencing first-hand the storyline of the characters. She weeps at the bedside as little Paul dies in ***Dombey and son*** (Dickens, 1848/2010d); she is outraged at the villainy of Quilp, in ***The old curiosity shop*** (Dickens, 1840/2010a); disgusted by the abuses of Jonas Chuzzlewit in ***Martin Chuzzlewit*** (Dickens, 1843/2010c), and inspired by the altruism of Sidney Carton in ***A tale of two cities*** (Dickens, 1859/2008). Again, it is Holland who summarises:

> In short, we can feel real emotions toward unreal fictions, because two different brain systems are at work. One, the prefrontal cortex's inhibiting system is at work because we know we are not supposed to act in response to the fiction we are reading ... We therefore cease to test reality and we do not disbelieve the fiction. But our corticolimbic system remains at work, and through it we feel the emotions we would ordinarily feel at the human situations we are watching ... We experience this astonishing phenomenon of real emotions toward fictional people and situations (Holland, 2009b, p. 6).

A qualifying comment is necessary, concerning the temporary nature of this phenomenon, which gives rise to a curious paradox: whilst the reader is fully immersed in and merged with her text, engaging emotionally with the characters and responding as if what she is reading were real, she is simultaneously still cognizant of the fact that she is reading fiction, and that those same heroes of literature who die in the novel, can be resurrected when the book is read again; that in some ways they are eternal as they live on for each and every reader in the pages she turns. This leads me to introduce a key point in my thesis: that the reader of literary fiction simultaneously occupies a psychically regressed position and also engages in high level cognitive activity. To describe this mental state, I have coined the term ***sophisticated paranoid schizoid position***, which I now go on to elucidate.

Sophisticated regression

I am concluding that the suspension of disbelief and concomitant state of psychic regression into merger with the text necessary to engage in a work of literary fiction needs to be held in tension with the fact that the educated, adult reader still needs to retain her higher mental functioning to decipher and interpret as well as reflect upon what she is reading (even though dissociated from taking any action connected with it). Lesser writes:

> There is a willing suspension of disbelief because we want to obtain the satisfactions which prompted us to read a given book. But our willingness to meet a book halfway must be requited: we are constantly judging and appraising, and if a work seems false or otherwise unworthy of our trust, we will become increasingly critical and less and less immersed in it (1960, p. 161).

I address the question of his latter point, concerned with what I refer to as the requisite ***attunement*** between reader and text in chapter six, asserting that there needs to be sufficient harmony between the reading pair for the exercise to be successful. My point here, however, is that, although reality testing may be paused in the immersion of reading, critical capacity is not abrogated, and the reader still draws upon her mental ability in the process. In other words, although the reader adopts a primitive, merged psychic state, she is at the same time engaging sophisticated literary skills and cognitive and symbolic capacity. I am arguing that the two processes are not mutually exclusive but need to be held in tension throughout the reading experience.

Unlike the infant in an undifferentiated state, the reader has the option at any point in her reading at will to interrupt her immersion, and think about what she is reading, in Holland's words, "to keep some part far enough away from that involvement to analyze the work's content, structure" (1975, p. 83). Thus, it is not a straight take over where, in the reader's abandonment, she loses her autonomy and conscious cognitive function, as she retains her analytical awareness and an objectivity with which to think about the experience and follow the plot. If the

reader becomes bored in her reading, or her engrossment is intruded upon by external concerns or discomfort, the blissful merger state is temporarily interrupted.

Psychoanalytic theory traditionally understands mental states as a series of binaries. Freud refers to primary and secondary (unconscious and conscious) processes (1900, 1920-22), to pleasure and reality principles (1909/1962, 1915-1917/1973, 1920-1922), while Melanie Klein advocates concepts of paranoid schizoid (primitive) and depressive (mature) psychic functioning (1958, 1975), as the two mental positions between which an individual oscillates throughout life, the former being the more defensive position. I believe this binary thinking does not adequately capture the processes involved in immersive literary reading, and propose a new formulation, which embraces and holds in tension these opposites. I propound a ***sophisticated paranoid schizoid*** position, which seeks to capture the concept that healthy schizoid processes are necessary for engagement with literary fiction, suggesting that the reader's capacity to engage in a mature way with the mechanism of splitting allows her to inhabit two worlds simultaneously. Further, I posit that reading is both conscious ***and*** unconscious as well as being a dyadic ***and*** triadic activity, necessitating the exclusivity of merger with the text whilst drawing on symbolic, Oedipal functioning.

To this end, I dispute Freud's supposition that reading, as a symbolic process, is exclusively linked to Oedipal processes (1910a, 1915-1917/1973) and the third position, ideas that were later developed by Lacan and the so-called "law of the father" (Bowie, 1991; Dor, 1998), arguing that reading embraces also a much more primitive, dyadic psychic state, akin to early object relations: that the capacity to be totally absorbed in a novel, in the same way as a child at play, is not connected to a third party. Further, I argue from consideration of Kleinian and post-Kleinian theorists, that reading requires ***both*** a symbolic understanding ***and*** a paranoid schizoid mindset, they not being mutually exclusive, as traditional interpretations would imply. I now explore these concepts further.

Freud, himself an avid reader of literary fiction (Decker, 1991; Gay, 1988), writes surprisingly little explicitly about the process itself of reading, focusing mainly on the experience of the creative writer or poet, rather than the reader (1908/2003a), but it may be inferred from elements of his theorising about the processes of thinking, dreaming and phantasying how he understood the psychodynamics of immersive reading. It is Freud who recognises (1911) that the development of the capacity for thinking (a normal maturational process) facilitates delayed gratification and the possibility of vicarious experiencing. He claims that the ability to rehearse an event in one's mind obviates the need for acting out; being able to think about a situation mitigates the full impact of direct experience. An individual learns how to contemplate an action and experience it mentally before – or, indeed, instead of – putting it into action. Mentation, therefore, is seen as a part of maturational development, leading to the capacity to live in a communal world and tame antisocial id impulses (recognising one is angry with someone and thinking about wringing his neck, rather than acting out the murderous intent).

> Thinking was endowed with characteristics which made it possible for the mental apparatus to tolerate an increased tension of stimulus while the process of discharge was postponed. It is essentially an experimental kind of acting, accompanied by displacement of relatively small quantities of cathexis together with less expenditure (discharge) of them (Freud, 1911, p. 221).

It is, I suggest, this sophisticated mechanism of being able to imagine and emotionally engage with scenarios on which the reader draws. Although, as I have discussed above, the reader experiences real emotion and arousal in the process of engaging with a literary text, because the matrix within which she is operating engages sophisticated mental processes, she expends less psychic energy than if she were actually a protagonist. I discuss more fully in chapter six the question of the non-human other and the phenomenon of the reader being able to bear reading about intolerable human situations. The key point here is to draw attention to the fact that this is an advanced mental process. In immersive literary reading, I suggest, this advanced mental process is operating concurrently with a primal, dyadic connection to the text.

The Freudian opposites of primary and secondary processes and the pleasure and reality principles are also problematic in the context of immersion in literature. Fiction reading is an activity which is teleologically in line with the pleasure principle, its end being enjoyment, providing, as it does, an antidote to, and escape from, the pressures and stresses of daily living. It is, however, a consciously chosen pursuit, and the pleasure derived from reading a novel is more mental and emotional than sensory or visceral (though physical comfort and mental relaxation are features of the context). It would, *ergo*, in Freud's thinking, not be considered to be driven by unconscious id impulses but aligned to secondary psychic processes. As the reader reads, she is thinking, and conjuring up the story in her imagination from the words on the page. This is using the secondary cognitive processes of which Freud (1920-1922) writes that are of value in the service of moderating the pleasure principle in a sophisticated, thoughtful manner, as the reader, through vicarious engagement with fictional characters, finds her own halfway house, and a way of processing to some extent her own inner conflicts, in a creative and aesthetically pleasing manner. It does not, however, neatly fit with the concepts of the reality principle, as it has to do with fictitious narratives and entering the world of play.

Freud (1900) describes the experience of dreaming, and the nature of the consciousness of the dreamer, qualities which, I suggest, also pertain to the reader: "detachment from the external world seems thus to be regarded as the factor determining the most marked features of dream-life" (p. 51). The reader of fiction also necessarily detaches herself from the external world and its realities, temporarily to enter the world of make-believe. On putting her book down and returning to reality, she has a sense of having been transported to an alternative environment, much as Freud describes the fact that: "someone who has just woken from sleep assumes that his dreams, even if they did not themselves come from another world, had at all events carried him off to another world" (p. 7). For the sleeper, in order to drift off into dreamland, she must relinquish conscious control of her environment, and ignore physical distractions. "The actual precondition of

sleep is not so much absence of sensory stimuli as absence of interest in them" (Freud, 1900, p. 51). So, also, for the reader there is a requisite turning away from external things in order to focus on the world of fiction.

I make a further parallel with reading from Freud's comments on dreaming and the nature of consciousness:

> In sleep the mind isolates itself from the external world and withdraws from its own periphery ... Nevertheless, connection is not broken off entirely. If we could not hear or feel while we were actually asleep, but only after we had woken up, it would be impossible to wake us at all" (Freud, 1900, p. 53).

Whilst there is a mental absorption in the dream or the novel, still the dreamer/reader does not completely lose contact with reality and is able to reconnect and switch consciousness as needed, so there is the operation of a dual consciousness, the dreamer/reader being present in both worlds, but with the majority of focus on dream/fiction.

The reading of fiction for Freud, therefore, may on the one hand be equated with the pleasure principle: "Our dreams at night, [as well as] our waking tendency to tear ourselves away from distressing impressions, ... are remnants of the dominance of this principle and proofs of its power" (Freud, 1911, p. 219). On the other hand, it may also be part of the reality principle, but in an adaptive way, and as part of a dialogue between the two worlds:

> Art brings about a reconciliation of the two principles in a unique way… shaping … fantasies into new kinds of reality, which are appreciated … as valid representations of the real world (Freud, 1911, p. 224).

Freud is writing about a synthesising of the two principles in the context of art. My research leads me to a slightly different position, which is that, in the process of literary reading, these principles remain distinct but need to be held in tension. The pleasure of abandonment to fantasy and escape from reality sits side by side with the fact that fiction mirrors life and real truths are brought to bear in the process of

reading that can have transformational and life-enhancing effects. I discuss this more fully in chapter seven. The act of reading is engaged with as a conscious, deliberate process, translating symbols on a page into meaningful narrative demanding highly skilled literacy capacity, ***and*** this conscious process is the gateway to connection with the reader's unconscious, whence imagination and personal reveries emanate.

Klein

Kleinian theory (1923, 1930) regards schizoid thinking as primitive and/or regressive. Mature mental activity is seen as compatible with the depressive position, where an appreciation of the realities of life/acceptance of the human condition is achieved. In paranoid schizoid thinking, in order to protect herself from intolerable, persecutory anxiety occasioned by an unconscious death instinct, the individual creates a fictitious, polarised view of the world and the others with whom she interacts, they being construed as benevolent or malign (the receptors for her own projections). Destructive tendencies and paranoid anxieties are kept at bay by thus attributing them to others. The conception of the other, *ergo*, is excessively evil or idealistically good. Only with the progressive maturation of normal development does the individual begin to conceive of the others in her world as possessing a combination of both positive and negative attributes, capable of both altruistic and narcissistic faculties.

Whilst admitting of the fact that adults from time to time revert to paranoid schizoid functioning when facing stress and anxiety (or, indeed, falling in love), Klein posits the preference to maintain a depressive mentality throughout life as far as possible. Further, the implication of her theory is that, not only is it desirable to attain a depressive outlook on life, but that there is also no enjoyment or benefit to be had from being otherwise, the regression to a paranoid schizoid mentality being only a temporary, defensive state, evoked in the course of processing emotional turmoil (Waddell, 2002). In other words, paranoid schizoid functioning is seen as uncomfortable and unpleasant, its ultimate expression being in mental disorders

such as schizophrenia, where being out of touch with reality can be a very frightening experience.

My thesis, however, takes an opposite view in the context of immersive literary reading, that it is incumbent upon the reader to adopt a schizoid mentality in order to be able to split herself off from day-to-day reality and engage successfully with her novel. It is, indeed, far from being defensive, an appropriate and mature position in this context. It is for this reason that I have adopted the nomenclature of referring to the tension of these two seeming opposites as a ***sophisticated paranoid schizoid position***. Being able to hold in harmony a primitive, undifferentiated state of mind with an accomplished literary ability that incorporates appreciation of the symbolic is, I find, the unique province of immersive literary reading. I discuss in chapter nine the juxtaposition of reading vis-à-vis life, and pose the question as to what extent the two activities may be seen to be in opposition. Drawing on my own experience of reading and a vignette from *Anna Karenina* (Tolstoy, 1873-1877/1999), I recognise that when reading is in the ascendency, it could be construed defensively as a retreat from life (Steiner, 1993). Another way of framing that might be to say that, in line with the Kleinian view of paranoid schizoid functioning, reading itself might be seen as in line with the death instinct, mitigating against life. It would, therefore, be expected that a paranoid schizoid mentality prevail in that context. When I first considered the idea that the reader's inner experience might be linked to paranoid schizoid mechanisms, I was thinking primarily about the need for the reader to adopt a primitive, regressed mindset, terming it "paranoid schizoid" as a type of shorthand signifier to capture this state. It was only as I delved more deeply into analysing my own reading journals and recognised the defensive elements of reading as a retreat from life, that I realised the deeper, more sinister connection with the paranoid schizoid life position, in its trend towards the death instinct. I find this nomenclature still relevant, even though I go on to show (in chapters seven and eight) that this is not the only mechanism at play, and that there is also present the opportunity for life-

giving transformational experiences through the medium of immersive literary reading.

So far, I have argued that reading requires an ability to enter a childlike, undifferentiated mental state, where the reader can merge with her text, divest herself of ego defences and abandon herself to the activity, and that this mental state is appropriate and prerequisite for a successful reading experience (and, *ergo*, ***sophisticated*** in the Bionic (1961) sense of being contextually apposite). I now consider in a little more detail the sophisticated part of the sophisticated paranoid schizoid mind set, to tease out the nature of some of the other mental processes simultaneously occurring. Literary reading is not simply an affective experience, providing an opportunity to engage with human dilemmas and conflicts in an undifferentiated way, devoid of the constraints of normal psychological defences and/or social conventions. If it were only about evocation, regression and reverie, a similar experience might be created by sitting in a sensory garden, losing oneself in a Beethoven symphony, or visiting a fairground rollercoaster, abandoning oneself to one's kinaesthetic sensations and allowing one's mind to free associate unimpeded. This is one dimension only of the literary experience. I draw here on literary theory to highlight the fact that, for a novel to engage the reader, there must also be mental satisfaction with cognitive enticement and engagement in terms of a plot, with characters and a dénouement.

It behoves the literary work, not just to create evocations within the reader, but also to captivate her interest, maintain her attention and thus to engage her both emotionally and mentally. There needs to be arousal, mystery, and intrigue (Bettelheim, 1976). For the reader to be actively engrossed and propelled to plumb the recesses of the plot and pursue it to its dénouement, she must be seduced into the promise of catharsis and resolution. Barthes expounds a helpful sexual metaphor: "Is not the most erotic portion of the body *where the garment gapes*? ... it is an intermittence ... which is erotic ... the staging of an appearance-as-disappearance ..." (Barthes, 1975, p. 10). Desire is heightened by flashing glimpses of the promise

of the erotic, or, with the text, tantalising hints of the finer points and mysteries of the plot, which the reader must remember and collate, pressing onward to her prize. The processes of desire, arousal and cognitive stimulation serve to seduce the reader and maintain her interest as she engages in the deeper, transformative experience of reading.

The reader has the pleasure of using her powers of recall, interpretation, and deduction to hold the plot in mind, explore its mystery, unravel its clues, and derive a sense of satisfaction from piecing it together (Brooks, 1984, p. 14). The plot is rarely presented in a linear, purely chronological way, and part-truths and red herrings are revealed along the way which become explicated at a later point, so the reader has to hold these pieces of information in mind, in order to make eventual sense of the plot. Brooks writes of "... a distinction urged by the Russian Formalists, that between *fabula* and *sjuzet*. *Fabula* is defined as the order of events referred to by the narrative, whereas *sjuzet* is the order of events presented in the narrative discourse" (Brooks, 1984, p. 12). It is for the reader to construct the ultimate *fabula* from the *sjuzet* of the incidents presented. Twists and turns in the plot keep interest alive, as does the switching from one character's story to another, or one time frame to an earlier one, so suspense builds, and all the time the reader is mentally arranging and rearranging her construal of events to make sense of them. This requires a sophisticated level of cognitive and literary ability.

It is incumbent on the text to provide enough variety of themes, characters, and plot to engage the reader, however, as Brooks notes:

> ... Just as in the visual arts, a whole must be of a size that can be taken in by the eye, so a plot must be "of a length to be taken in by memory. ... This is important, since memory - as much in reading a novel as in seeing a play - is the key faculty in the capacity to perceive relations of beginnings, middles and ends through time, the shaping power of narrative (Brooks, 1984, p. 11).

Some of the reader's pleasure is derived from the cognitive satisfaction of making sense of the incidents which are being recounted to her. Thus, the sustaining of cognitive titillation is *sine qua non* for a successful reading experience.

Exaggeration

To pique the reader's interest, I discovered that a literary text needs to go beyond the mundane, both in the beauty of its language and also in the nature of its plot, to embroider life stories of a more spectacular kind than everyday occurrences. Passages of evocative description, which would be quite inappropriate in everyday parlance, pepper the pages of the great novelists. The stage is set to introduce Dickens's landlord John Willet, in *Barnaby Rudge*, for example, thus:

> The evening with which we have to do, was neither a summer nor an autumn one, but the twilight of a day in March, when the wind howled dismally among the bare branches of the trees, and rumbling in the wide chimneys and driving the rain against the windows of the Maypole Inn, gave such of its frequenters as chanced to be there at the moment an undeniable reason for prolonging their stay, and caused the landlord to prophesy that the night would certainly clear at eleven o'clock precisely, - which by a remarkable coincidence was the hour at which he always closed his house (Dickens, 1841/2010b, p. 5).

The reader is painted a bleak picture of a dreary night, with nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs alike conspiring to evoke that dismal image. She sees the twilight, hears the howling and rumbling of the wind, and feels the dampness and hostility of the driving rain, and experiences for herself the impending doom. She is drawn in to wish to hear more of the evening's proceedings. This evocative experience is created by a particular use of language, appreciation for which is a prerequisite in the art of literary reading (and part of the necessary sophisticated capability of the reader).

Knights (1995) claims that literature uses this different kind of elevated language not simply for aesthetic pleasure but also as part of the frame, as a way to set the text apart from the everyday and draw attention to aspects of life to which the reader becomes inured. By virtue of its literary devices and richly evocative

turns of phrase, scholarly fiction is singled out from the soap opera of daily living and presents the reader with an alternative way to understand life. "Accordingly, the function of literary texts is to wake us up, to depict things in ways that are new and shocking" (Knights, 1995, p. 29).

Storylines embellish the experiences of their heroes and heroines far and above the life events of the majority of the populace, whilst yet recounting the essence of human lives and loves the world over. The function of embellishment serves to delineate the real from the pretend, and also has echoes of the containing function of a mother's hyperbole for her baby: "...the exaggerated imitation of its "affect" enables the baby to recognize [it] as a representation of its own feelings, to thus distinguish these facial expressions from its parents' own feelings" (Diem-Wille, 2011, p. 129). A key point for the infant is not only the benefit of recognising an expression of its previously nameless sensations, but also that " ... parents' exaggerated imitation of expressions of negative feelings can calm the baby" (Diem-Wille, 2011, p. 136). Indeed, "it has even been proven through experiments that babies can be calmed much more quickly if negative affect is exaggerated *ad absurdum* or expressed playfully" (Malatesta & Izard, 1984, as cited in Diem-Wille, 2011, p. 137). I conclude that the literary reader, unconsciously finding an exaggerated representation of some of her emotional struggles in the pages of a book, derives a degree of self-understanding which had otherwise eluded her. I discuss in chapter eight the incidence of *psychic intensities* (Bollas, 1995) in the reading of literary fiction and the opportunity they afford the reader for hypercathecting life events. The nature of the container is significant. For the infant, the continuing focused attention of her caregiver conveys the sense that life goes on; this sensation is bearable (Diem-Wille, 2011). For the reader, the text as well as the process of reading itself is the container. Whatever she finds of herself reflected in the pages of the novel is presented in the context of the greater oeuvre, which remains unchanged, and the narrative continues, or is there to revisit. It does not alter as the reader alters, and this performs a containing function, much as Bion's (1967/2007b) conception that the capacity to think about something (the very act of thinking, rather than the thoughts that might emerge from the thinking) is of

itself containing. So, the fact that the text presents a finished work of art out of the losses, deprivations, traumas, and anxieties of life provides a container for these uncomfortable realities, and a way of processing them almost vicariously.

This is not to imply that the production of a story, any story, is sufficient and the content of the narrative is irrelevant. Indeed, Robert Hellenga considers that one of the primary appeals of literary fiction is that of "articulation", seeing its function as:

> put[ting] something into words for us. The experience may be simple and satisfying, like the experience of finding a word that has been mysteriously eluding us; or it may be enormously gratifying, as when we find words that are adequate to a complex experience such as love or bereavement, joy or frustration (Hellenga, 1982, p. 108).

He tells the story of how Helen Keller, unable to see or hear the sound of the word, derived a sense of satisfaction, after having experienced the feel of water running through her fingers, from having the word "w-a-t-e-r" spelled out for her in braille. Her delight stemmed from the fact that "everything had a name" (Hellenga, 1982, p. 107). Borrowing (or as De Certeau might prefer "poaching") the words of the text appear to provide, therefore, a containing function for the reader, as they encapsulate the essence of an experience which she might otherwise struggle to articulate. Relief comes from the expression of it.

This couples with a further point, that, along with the function of articulation, literary reading can also have an equally important function from the opposite perspective of broadening the reader's horizons to experiences outside of her own, and take the reader into an understanding of alterity. This Hellenga terms "seeing through other eyes", which "must be distinguished from what is generally meant by "vicarious gratification ... [as it] involves an expansion or sharpening of consciousness" (Hellenga, 1982, p. 109). The analogy here is "looking out [of] a window, not a mirror" (Hellenga, 1982, p. 110).

Unlike the implication of Freud's (1908/2003), Lichtenstein's (1977) and Holland's (2009) concepts of identity themes, where the reader is condemned for ever to view life and her appraisal of literature through the lens of her own intrinsic experiences, seeing through other eyes broadens horizons and invites the reader to look at the world through another's perception, thus permitting the envisioning of new possibilities, an opportunity to step off her own treadmill, or outside her own transferences, transcending the personal and entering into the life of another. Clearly this does afford a fresh perspective and may bring relief of a different kind. I cite various examples in chapter seven from my own journals of how my reading experience enabled me to see through other eyes and view situations from a different standpoint that was personally transformational.

Milner writes of the benefits of broadening one's horizons in this way, distinguishing two types of attention:

> ... narrow attention, when she focused on whatever her immediate interests chose; and wide attention, when she abandoned her immediate interests and emptied herself to whatever occurred through telling herself, 'I have nothing, I know nothing, I want nothing'. Paradoxically she found that, in thus emptying herself, she became instantly full and alive" (Sayers, 2002, p. 109).

Openness to the other and seeing through other eyes resonate with this concept of wide attention and are testimony to value of a very different kind of awareness which is open to the receptive reader, to transcend the personal and allow herself to be changed by engaging with a wider reality.

Conclusion

The mystery of the literary situation may be summed up in a series of paradoxes. It may be used both as an escape, to avoid reality, being lost to the world in a tale of fiction, but also to help face it, "to both dull consciousness and heighten it" (Stephens, 1989, p. 573). The reader may be regarded at one end of the spectrum as a "poacher" (De Certeau, 1984, p. 174), one who preys upon, or at least appropriates, the creativity of another for her own ends, and at the other end of the spectrum, a

necessary and vibrant part of the contract between text and audience, for without her engagement with the narrative, the words on the page are inert. Whilst psychically replaying and revisiting her own "identity themes" (Lichtenstein, 1977) in the course of creating her individual hermeneutic of the literature, she may also gain the experience of "seeing through other eyes" (Hellenga, 1982), and thus broaden her own, insular perspective, often with therapeutic and transformational effect (Bollas, 1987).

At the point of engaging in literary fiction, the reader ***both*** occupies a primitive psychic space of merger with the text ***and*** engages mature cognitive and symbolic skills, a combined mental state I am referring to as a ***sophisticated paranoid schizoid*** position. To abandon herself to a deep involvement with a literary text, she willingly suspends disbelief in approaching a fictitious plot and engaging with make believe characters. Coupled with this is her awareness that it is not incumbent upon her to take any action with regard to the story, so she is free to enter that blissful, regressed state where she can be taken up in her reverie and imagination and simply allow herself to be transported. At the same time, she retains access to her evaluative cognitive function and symbolic capacity, in order to be able to recall events of the story and make sense of the plotlines, as well as appreciate the intricacies of advanced language and linguistic devices, so as to arrive at the satisfaction of the final dénouement.

Finally, in the course of engagement with this process, which is partly a creation of her own, she allows the text to work on her and to affect her in such a way that she emerges from the experience transformed, as Brooks asserts of the purpose of fiction, that: "stories ultimately seek to change the minds and the lives of those they touch" (Brooks, 1994, p. 67).

Chapter three: ***Le grand Meaulnes***

In this chapter I set out a seminal part of my thesis and present my portal novel *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971), introducing my claim that the story of Meaulnes is the story of the reader of literary fiction. The reader of this book is being shown what happens in the process of reading a novel. It holds up a mirror to the reader to show her, in experience, what happens to her psychically whilst engaged in the process of reading. I am taking, therefore, an innovative stance vis-à-vis this novel, deliberately not offering a literary criticism of the book, nor critiquing the commentaries of the many other theorists (Cranston, 1979; Federman, 1966; Gibson, 1975, 2005; Maclean, 1977; Schier, 1952) who have written on it, but wish to present the novel as, itself, a ***methodology***, a way of showing by experience what happens when reading. A reader absorbed in the story of Augustin Meaulnes will feel for herself what it is like to inhabit the world of reading fiction. She will become personally acquainted with the process through reading the story. It is, thus, a heuristic process of understanding a phenomenon from the inside out, the story serving to furnish a framework by which that experience may be articulated. It is not simply a way of thinking about what happens psychically when engrossed in the reading process, it goes beyond this, actually to replicate in experience, through engagement with the novel, what it is like.

Set in pre-war France, at the end of the romantic period in literature, Alain-Fournier's only novel *Le grand Meaulnes* (1913/1971) is a much acclaimed piece of fiction, which has been translated into 33 languages (Gibson, 2005) and still enjoys enormous popularity, partly because of its nostalgic, evocative style, and partly because of the universal appeal of its themes of mystery, love and loss, and partly, I hope to show, because at an unconscious level it holds up a mirror to the process of immersive literary reading.

My first encounter with the novel was almost five decades ago, as a schoolgirl entering the sixth form, discovering it as one of the set texts I studied for French A level. Perhaps the sense of nostalgia, as I look back, colours my

reminiscences, but I well recall how, at the time, I was captivated by the text. As the story unfolded, I was mesmerised, feeling myself swept up in the mists of fiction, as surely as the fog descended over the landscape in the novel. The language was enchanting, and the narrative haunting. I lost myself in the story, never quite knowing whether the events recalled were in the principal character's imagination, or (fictional) facts. I have read the text at various junctures in my life since that time of study, and, although each reading experience has been different, I have never been disappointed, but rather on every occasion found myself entranced anew, and captivated by the spell of it.

That I have been an avid reader of literary fiction from my youth leads me to wonder whether I had made an unconscious connection between the process of reading and this evocative novel, long before I made the conscious link, when contemplating this current research into the psychodynamics of the reader's experience of reading. I found myself frequently drawn to *Le grand Meaulnes*, as I thought about the mysterious psychic domain that the reader enters when engaged with literary fiction. The journey taken by the novel's hero evocatively guides its reader metaphorically through this process in a very graphic way and is the gateway through which I wish to begin this journey of exploration. I am suggesting that the story of Augustin Meaulnes (dubbed by his schoolmates, on account of his unusual height, "*le grand Meaulnes*") is, effectively, the story of the reader, and that his literal process of escape and entry into an alternative world is analogous to the process in which the reader engages, of leaving one psychic reality and entering another.

In this current chapter, after a brief synopsis of the story of the novel, I draw out some key themes that arise from it, which have resonances with, and form part of my thesis on, the experience of reading. In particular I will make links to Winnicott's writing (1960, 1967a, 1969, 1971) on the use of an object and an individual's relationship with the Other, Milner's (1950/2010, 1987a) work on the importance of letting go, and Bollas's (1978, 1987) ideas on the transformational

object. These themes are also revisited in greater depth in subsequent chapters. I start with a brief overview of the novel:

The synopsis

The reader of this text is introduced to Augustin Meaulnes, Alain-Fournier's eponymous hero, on a November day, when, at the age of 17, he arrives at the little French secondary school which is the home of François, the story's narrator, who is the son of M. Seurel, the schoolmaster. Mme. Meaulnes presents herself in a somewhat flustered state at the doorstep of the schoolhouse, but there is no sign of her son, Augustin, who has already gone off to explore the accommodation and environs where he is to board with the Seurels. Shortly before Christmas, he decides to truant from school. He plans his "*évasion*" (escape)[5] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 32) in advance, but confides his intention to no-one, not even François, who by now has become a trusted companion. M. and Mme. Charpentier (François's maternal grandparents) are expected for Christmas, and Meaulnes collects the horse and cart earmarked for their transport, in advance of the party deputed to fetch them, and sets off ostensibly to bring them from the station. He experiences a sense of elation and freedom as he begins his adventure, having thrown off the shackles of schoolwork and the confines of the classroom.

Whilst on the journey, Meaulnes loses his way. Tiredness overcomes him and he falls asleep for a while, as the mare drawing his cart trots on regardless. The mists descend and darkness falls by the time he admits he is well and truly lost. Eventually he finds himself in a clearing, whence, in due course, he stumbles upon an ancient country estate, "*[le] vieux Domaine perdu*"[6] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 151). He hears juvenile voices and discovers there is a carnival in progress, peopled largely by children and youths. He allows himself to be swept along by the characters whom he meets there, being awoken from having fallen asleep in a bed which he had happened upon, by an actor who entreats him to don the fancy dress

[5] all translations provided are my own
[6] the lost domain

outfit laid out on the adjacent chair, and join the party. Without question, he complies and finds himself participating in the proceedings with abandon, every remembrance of his school life banished, as he immerses himself in the scenario unfolding before him, and, in fact, becomes a principal player in it.

During his stay in the "*domaine étrange*"[7] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 65) (of a few days' duration), Augustin joins the assembled company on an outing which entails a boat ride and a picnic, where he meets, and falls in love with, the beautiful Yvonne de Galais. He discovers that the fête was intended as a wedding feast, but, by chance, encounters the bridegroom, Yvonne's brother, Frantz, who informs him: "... c'est fini; la fête est finie. Vous pouvez descendre le leur dire. Je suis rentré tout seul. Ma fiancée ne viendra pas"[8] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 114). Meaulnes is so moved by the desperation of this unfortunate, that he declares undivided allegiance to him, promising to be there for him at any time in the future, should the need arise. The wedding party then disperses, and Meaulnes eventually returns to school, his adventure seemingly over.

He is, however, a changed person, the echoes of his experience reverberating psychically, in the same way that the vestiges of the carnival linger in his outward appearance, such that François immediately notices: "Je vis qu'il portait, au lieu du petit gilet à boutons de cuivre, qui était d'uniforme sous le paletot, un étrange gilet de soie ... "Cette pièce mystérieuse d'un costume ... n'était pas le sien"[9] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, pp. 52-54). Meaulnes struggles to settle to his studies and spends his every free moment trying to plot the route of his journey on a map, so that he may find his way back to the *domaine étrange*, so great has been the impact of his experience on him.

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[7] strange habitation

[8] It's over; the carnival is over. You may go down and tell them. I have returned alone. My fiancée is not coming.

[9] I saw that, instead of the little uniform leather-buttoned waistcoat, he wore under his outer jacket a strange silk waistcoat ... This mysterious item of clothing was not his own.

In the second and third parts of the novel, Meaulnes does return to the old domain, does eventually marry Yvonne de Galais, but, on their wedding night, is called away to the aid of Frantz, and only returns home after Yvonne has died, giving birth to his little daughter. François, who has befriended the hapless Yvonne and looked after the child after her death, ends the novel, at the point of Meaulnes's eventual return (some years later): "Et déjà je l'imaginais, la nuit, enveloppant sa fille dans un manteau, et partant avec elle pour de nouvelles aventures"[10] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 338).

Such a cursory summary of the plot does not do justice to the richly evocative writing of Alain-Fournier, nor the nuanced understandings of the processes through which the protagonists go in the course of the story, but it provides a starting point from which to begin in-depth exploration, and introduces the idea of the journey into the unknown, taken by Meaulnes, which I believe mirrors the reader's experience of reading fiction. I now go on to illustrate and delve into the dynamics of literary reading, analysing what happens from the reader's deliberate, pleasurable anticipation of taking herself into a world beyond the mundane, the way in which curiosity impels a continuation of the journey, through to her immersion and absorption in the process, where the self of the reader merges with, and becomes taken up in the narrative, as the metaphorical mists descend, such that boundaries blur between self and other, reality and fiction. There is then the question of the impact on the reader of her experience and her (possible) transformation because of it, as well as discussion of her relationship to and ownership of her reading experience. How far does the reader appropriate the text as her own creation, effectively killing off the author and possessively taking credit for the whole experience?

[10] Already I can imagine him, wrapping his daughter in a greatcoat one night, and leaving with her in search of new adventures.

Anticipation

The first element in the story, and part of any reading experience, is intention. Meaulnes decides on his escapade the day before he puts the plan into action. François observes something of the faraway look in his eye, and his inattention to the here-and-now on the eve of his departure: "En le voyant ainsi, perdu dans ses réflexions, regardant, comme à travers des lieues de brouillard ces gens paisibles qui travaillaient, je pensai soudain à cette image de *Robinson Crusoé,* où l'on voit l'adolescent anglais avant son grand départ ..."[11] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, pp. 30-31). For Meaulnes, the prospect of taking time away from the banality of mundane schoolwork, and finding a change of scene in the wider world, is a driving force, even though at this point, he simply thinks he is going to the station for an hour or so, to meet François's grandparents and bring them back to the schoolhouse. For him, the added stimulation is that it is an illicit foray that has not been sanctioned by his teacher, and his classmates are having to remain and attend to their lessons. His anticipated adventure is a punctuation to his everyday life, to which he expects to return by the end of the afternoon.

Such intentions evidently coalesce with those of the reader of fiction, whose objective is to engage in a temporary respite from routine, finding relief from the stresses and impingements of her daily duties, in the alternative world of other times, other places, other lives, and make-believe. Although the reader of literary fiction may, in the process, find herself engaged in personal reveries in parallel with the story, as unconscious thought is facilitated in the process, the ***intention*** to read is deliberate. A conscious choice is made, and concomitant action taken, as the book is picked up, the pages turned, and the eyes focused on them. Such immersive reading does not happen by chance and entails a degree of forethought and planning, as well as conscious effort. At a practical level, this involves at the very least obtaining the requisite book, and having it in possession at the appropriate time, but, more importantly, at a psychic level, the thought of reading presages a

[11] Seeing him like that, lost in his own imaginings, as he watched through the fog, the men at work, I suddenly recollected an image of Robinson Crusoe, as a young man before he departed on his great voyage.

changed consciousness, and a deliberate, conscious choice to engage with an alternative mental space. Meaulnes is deliberately intending to suspend his normal activities in favour of a different experience. He is mentally prepared for his trip (even though he does not know where it will take him), and has decided upon the timing of his departure, the point at which he will change one set of circumstances for another.

Prerequisite for the fiction reader, in the anticipation of engaging with an alternative reality, is a willingness to "suspend disbelief", a term first coined by Coleridge (1817, n.p.), in connection with his own poetry, whereby the reader allows herself temporarily to enter into another state of consciousness outside of her everyday life. She approaches the work of literary fiction with a predetermined desire to enter the world of make-believe, and in full knowledge that what she will read is a fabricated story. She wants to be enthralled, to be fascinated, and can only do this because she knows that the story she is reading is not real. That psychic anticipation, as well as physical preparation, is also present might be evidenced by the description of Meaulnes (quoted above), Robinson Crusoe-like, preoccupied with the thought of his forthcoming escapade, the evening before he goes.

Thus, the purpose of both Meaulnes's truanting, and the reader's reading, is diversion. "One reads for pleasure" (Bennett, 2007, p. 45). The intention is enjoyment and entertainment, a calculated attempt temporarily to have respite from the everyday. "Aesthetic reading, by its very nature, has an intrinsic purpose, the desire to have a pleasurable, interesting experience for its own sake" (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 275). This teleology, therefore, has a profound effect on the manner in which a literary text is approached by its reader. She reads to be entertained, to be diverted from that which normally occupies her, into a different state of mind that she finds altogether more pleasurable. As the reader picks up her book in the knowledge that she is seeking a satisfying experience, in the pursuit of enjoyment, so Meaulnes picked up the reins of the horse and cart to experience a sense of freedom, to leave behind the drudgery of lessons and book-learning for a new

experience, though, in each case, the experience anticipated (collecting the grandparents/reading a story) may lead to something much more fulfilling.

A phenomenon which might conceptually be applied to the anticipation phase of reading, is the sexual metaphor of foreplay. French literary theorist, Roland Barthes, writes suggestively of this, posing the rhetorical question: "Is not the most erotic portion of the body *where the garment gapes*? ..." (Barthes, 1975, p. 10). The titillating sense of anticipation may be generated by a fleeting glimpse of the prize, which may be literal sight of something physical which seduces the senses, or metaphorical, as in the mental imagining which stimulates cognitive expectation of pleasure. These processes of desire, arousal, and titillation, I find, serve to draw in the reader, and perpetuate the ongoing inquisitiveness, requisite to engage in the process.

Curiosity

One does not have to read further than the first few pages of *Le grand Meaulnes* to recognise that curiosity oozes out of every pore of its eponymous hero. His first appearance in the novel, an advent much awaited by François, is marked by his absence. His mother is introduced, in a state of anxiety at his disappearance: "Où est-il passé? Mon Dieu! ... Il était avec moi tout à l'heure. Il a déjà fait le tour de la maison. Il s'est peut-être sauvé ..."[12] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 16). One wonders how many bookworms might be the subject of similar imprecations when those accompanying them are frustrated to find them effectively absent with their noses in a book! (I discuss further in chapter six the question of the reader's desire to hide.)

As for Meaulnes, strange noises emanating at first from the basement and then from the attic are heard by the assembled company, indicating that the new arrival has already started exploring, his curiosity outweighing his sense of

[12] Where has he gone? Good Lord! He was with me just a minute ago. He will have found his way round the house already. Perhaps he's run off ..

propriety. He emerges, smiling, from his initial inspections, and, having set eyes for the first time on François, addresses him: "Viens-tu dans la cour?"[13] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 19). Again, social niceties and introductions are in thrall to curiosity, which takes precedence and drives Meaulnes to continue the pursuit of his investigations. There is, I suggest, a similar antisocial element to the experience of immersive reading, the pastime providing the reader with a quasi-acceptable excuse to dispense with social pleasantry and remove herself from the necessity of making conversation, in what would be deemed very bad manners in other circumstances.

Once the two lads are outside, Meaulnes reveals the findings of his earlier explorations: the remnant of some 14 July fireworks: "Il y en a deux qui ne sont pas parties: nous allons toujours les allumer"[14] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 19). Thus comes about the first cameo appearance of Augustin, in which it transpires that curiosity is part of the fibre of his being, coupled with a complementary sense of fearlessness, as he advances into the unknown.

At the time of his *évasion*, once Meaulnes embarks on his escapade, his response to finding himself lost further demonstrates how curiosity propels him forward. Rather than being overtaken by fear or despondency, as the cold and dark start to envelop him, the not-knowing is assimilated as part of the adventure. On reaching the clearing where for the first time he sees the mysterious lights of the *domaine étrange*, rather than retreating, Meaulnes's response is to press forward and investigate the estate, in an attitude of awe and wonder, seemingly unaware of, or out of touch with concern for, any possible threats to himself as an intruder.

It is this attitude of being-in-a-state-of-curiousness that I conclude typifies the stance of the reader. There is a desire to know, to find out, to follow the plot, to find the answers to the mysteries posed, yes, but more important than simply acquiring the knowledge, is the ***state of curiousness*** which prevails. To be in that

[13] Are you coming out into the yard?

[14] There are a couple that have not been lit: we're going to set them off!

state, I find, is prerequisite to being a successful literary reader, and is also part of what the reader seeks in reading, as reading provides a forum in which that state-of-curiousness is perpetuated.

Theoretical discussion of this topic will focus principally around the ideas of Klein (1926, 1928, 1932) and Bion (1962, 1962/2007a) in consideration of their writings about the epistemophilic impulse, an innate drive to know and for learning. Although it was Freud (1905a, 1913a) who first wrote about the thirst for knowledge as an instinctual drive, his ideas were explicitly in the context of childhood curiosity about sexual matters, and the search for understanding as a way of allaying anxieties about this unknown (sexual) phenomenon. Interestingly, as well as equating the instinct for knowledge with "a sublimated manner of obtaining mastery" (Freud, 1905a, p. 194), he notes that it also "makes use of the energy of scopophilia" (1905a, p. 194). The process of vicarious satisfaction and voyeuristic engagement might also be applied to the reader of literary fiction, an issue to which I return in later discussions.

Developing Freud's ideas, Klein postulated an "epistemophilic instinct" (Klein, 1926, 1928, 1932) particularly in connection with Oedipal development, and as a way to overcome anxiety (Arvanitakis, 1985). Further, Bion's (1962, 1962/2007a) contribution to this debate focuses on the importance for all learning of this central epistemic[15] impulse, a primary drive which propels towards knowledge, and he sees the desire to know as an end in itself, rather than a means to other instinctive gratification (like discovering the source of food to satisfy hunger or finding a suitable object with which to satiate sexual desire). I take this thinking a stage further and conclude that part of the fascination for reading has to do with the reader maintaining ***a state of curiousness***, which is not, *per se*, simply about an epistemic impulse to find out what happens to the characters in the story (though this is an intrinsic element of what happens), but rather that the activity of reading

[15] I share Arvanitakis's (1985, p. 437) preference for "epistemic" to "epistemophilic", the latter's etymology implying the love of knowledge, whereas the former more accurately reflects the instinct to know, which is what I am discussing.

requires the reader to maintain a mental state of curiousness, and it is being in this state wherein lies the pleasure, not the end result of curiosity being cognitively satisfied. Having reached the end of a novel, when ends are tied up and mysteries are revealed, there may be a sense of satisfaction for the reader, but at the same time a sense of anti-climax and loss as the emotional satisfaction of experiencing the state of being curious is temporarily suspended, until the next book is started. My sense is that being with the living experience of reading is more fulfilling than the mental satisfaction of the knowledge acquired in the dénouement.

Paradoxically, whilst the epistemic impulse, the urge to know, drives this state, I see its opposite phenomenon, what Bion referred to as "negative capability" (1970, p. 125), a term which he borrowed from a letter Keats wrote to his cousin in 1817 (Rollins, 1958), also as prerequisite in the experience of reading. Keats in that letter, defined negative capability as "when a man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (1817, n.p.). The reader, I found, in order to relish the state of curiousness which pertains as she engages in the process of reading, needs to maintain an attitude of negative capability, being able to contain her questions, the elements of mystery involved, enjoying delaying gratification of that curiosity, to relish the process of reading, and ***being*** curious. For some readers, the temptation might be too great, as they turn to the last page of the book to see how things end before embarking on a novel. In this case, it would appear that not-knowing is intolerable and the desire for cognitive homeostasis and a lessening of any emotional anxiety associated with being held in a state of not-knowing takes precedence and circumvents the natural unfolding process and capacity for negative capability. Not only, I believe, does the reader need to be able to cultivate a capacity for negative capability, she positively has to enjoy and welcome it, to relish the sense of being suspended, having her curiosity piqued.

The emotional experience of being in a state-of-curiousness which propels the reader ***forward*** is, I suggest, equally balanced with an emotive engagement

which is born of reminiscences and evocations, and so takes the reader ***back*** in time to earlier memories (both conscious and unconscious). Coupled with the epistemic desire to know, to be in a state of enquiry/discovery, is the pleasure of being reminded of (often non-specific) events, places and experiences which are already familiar to the reader and fuel her imagination in conjuring up a picture of the story, in relation to her own experience of life. I am (perhaps rather inadequately) terming this latter phenomenon "enchantment". I conclude that evocation and nostalgia engender the psychic state of wellbeing that emanates from the reader's enchantment.

The narrative of Alain-Fournier's hero is pervaded by an ethos of melancholy and longing, alongside the bravado and innocence of youth. Meaulnes is naively enchanted by the whole experience at the *domaine perdu*, as well as by the bewitching beauty of Yvonne de Galais and the adolescent, histrionic responses of her brother, Frantz. This sense of magic and being caught up in the unfolding drama is also, I find, the experience of the reader of literary fiction. Taken into other realities, she is captivated, both by what she learns of the characters and the story, and by the sense of connection with primitive experiences, which constitute Alain-Fournier's *domaine perdu*. "... The Lost Land ... is both proximate and unreachable, familiar and otherworldly" (Ziegler, 2007, p. 135), and herein lies its seduction. Part of the experience of reading involves a "... literary repossession of a past which is seen as an Eden - whether it is primarily a real past or an imaginary one" (Savage, 1964, p. 167).

To return to Meaulnes: he appears tired and limping, having spent a cold, uncomfortable night sleeping on the straw of a sheep pen, just before he happens upon the *domaine étrange*:

> Le vent glacé lui gerçait les lèvres, le suffoquait par instants; et pourtant un contentement extraordinaire le soulevait, une tranquillité parfaite et presque enivrante, la certitude que son but était atteint et qu'il n'avait plus maintenant que du bonheur à espérer. C'est ainsi que, jadis, la veille des grandes fêtes d'été, il se sentait défaillir, lorsqu'à la tombée de la nuit on plantait des sapins dans les rues du

> bourg et que la fenêtre de sa chambre était obstruée par les branches[16] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 76).

He feels a striking sense of optimism and wellbeing, incompatible with his miserable physical state and external circumstances, and finds himself connecting with happy childhood memories. It is this sense of nostalgia which is evoked throughout *Le grand Meaulnes* that epitomises for me a significant part of the reading experience.

What makes the psychic space which the reader inhabits whilst engaged in reading (or poetry or music) so compelling and, therefore, seductive, is, I suggest, the fact that it is elusive (James, 1902/2009). It cannot be grasped, and is not concrete, but ephemeral, existing only in the imagination of the reader (and only in the process of reading), who catches brief glimpses of this other reality. Meaulnes is constantly seeking to recapture the mysterious and compelling experience he had at the old manor house. Once he returns to school, he becomes preoccupied with trying to discover the location of the place, in order to retrace his steps and recapture the experience: "Il découvrit bientôt un petit atlas, qu'il se mit à étudier avec passion, debout sur l'estrade ...."[17] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 48). He cannot wait to relax and look at the contents calmly, but immediately upon finding the map book, even whilst still standing, obsessively sets about studying it, so strong is his compulsion to return. The experience has gripped him to such an extent that he is unable to settle back to his studies and his old life. He has been bewitched.

On the strength of seeing her just one evening, sitting at the piano, Meaulnes becomes enchanted by the young woman who turns out to be Yvonne de Galais, and the following morning gets up early to pursue his quest to meet with her. As if

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[16] An icy wind cut his lips and suffocated him at times; and yet he was overcome by an inexplicable contentment, a perfect and almost intoxicating serenity, a certainty that he had reached his goal and now had nothing but happiness to look forward to. It reminded him of the old days, of the day before a summer fate, where he would not be able to contain his excitement as night fell and fir trees were planted along the road, such that his bedroom window was obstructed by the branches.

[17] He found a little atlas, which he set about studying voraciously, still standing on the staircase.

mesmerised by her, Augustin engineers three brief occasions that day when they meet and exchange a few words, the first, and most significant thing he says to her simply being: "vous êtes belle"[18] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 105). He knows nothing of her, except a few cursory glimpses of her physically, but is enchanted to the point of pursuit. Meaulnes is open to being enchanted, to inhabiting this mysterious space of dreams and memories, in much the same way as the reader of literary fiction is looking to be enchanted and fascinated by other worlds, familiar and unfamiliar, in the process of reading. In order psychically to engage fully with the material of literary fiction, the reader, I argue, must also be prepared to let go of the structures and realities of everyday life and temporarily abandon herself to the pursuit of reading. It becomes an all-consuming activity, with which the reader engages, heart and soul.

Abandonment

Meaulnes very quickly becomes enchanted by the *domaine étrange* and the goings on there. The reader can imagine him, open-mouthed in awe and wonder as he surveys the ancient manor house and witnesses the lavish spectacle of actors, clowns, and performers, all in fancy dress. Although initially reluctant, and anxious not to be discovered as an imposter, he soon throws himself unreservedly into the pageant unfolding before him when invited to do so.

Having found his way inside the old manor house to what he thinks is a loft space (though it turns out to be a large bedroom), where he anticipates being able to get some rest after his disturbed night, Meaulnes finally settles to sleep, but is awoken by a bohemian, whose address instructs him to join the party:

> Monsieur, l'Endormi ... vous n'avez plus qu'à vous éveiller, à vous habiller en marquis, même si vous êtes un marmiteux comme je suis; et vous descendrez à la fête costumée, puisque c'est le bon plaisir de ces messieurs et de ces petites demoiselles[19] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, pp. 85-86).

[18] You are beautiful!

[19] Mr Sleepy-head! All you have to do is wake up, put on this marquis costume, even if you are a nobody like me, and come down and join in the fete. Such are the wishes of our young hosts and hostesses.

Overhearing news of supper being served, Augustin talks himself into attending, reasoning that his presence and the invitation he has received to join in the proceedings, at the pleasure of the young people, is all the permission he needs:

> Descendre au dîner, pensa-t-il, je ne manquerai pas de le faire. Je serai simplement un invité dont tout le monde a oublié le nom. D'ailleurs, je ne suis pas un intrus ici. Il est hors de doute qu['ils] ... m'attendaient[20] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 87).

Seemingly almost trance-like, Meaulnes follows his instructions, allowing himself to be swept along by the characters around him, temporarily divesting himself of his own identity and assuming an *alter ego*, as he literally clothes himself in the costume provided: "[I]l endossa sur sa blouse d'écolier un des grands manteaux dont il releva le collet plissé, remplaça ses souliers ferrés par de fins escarpins vernis et se prépara à descendre nu-tête"[21]. Once in the dining hall, all thoughts as to his status at the event are banished, and he enters unapologetically into the unfolding drama as a participant: "Meaulnes, avec audace et sans s'émouvoir, enjamba un banc et se trouva assis auprès de deux vieilles paysannes. Il se mit aussitôt à manger avec un appétit féroce"[22] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 92). Thus, he starts to shed his former schoolboy identity to take on the persona of guest at the matrimonial celebrations, losing himself in the unfolding drama.

This take-over continues the following day when, obeying his instructions, Augustin once more dresses himself into the part, taking on the identity of invitee:

> Le lendemain ... comme on le lui avait conseillé, il revêtit un simple costume noir, de mode passée, une jacquette serrée à la taille avec des manches bouffant aux épaules,

[20] Come down for dinner, he thought, I will certainly not fail to do that. I shall simply be a guest whose name everyone has forgotten. Anyway, I am not an intruder here. Clearly, they were expecting me.

[21] He put on over his schoolboy shirt a heavy overcoat, with its collar turned up, replaced his hob-nailed boots with some patent leather shoes and made ready to go downstairs, bare-headed.

[22] Boldly and with no sign of self-consciousness, Meaulnes straddled one of the benches and found himself sitting next to two elderly countrywomen. He started eating straightaway with a ravenous appetite.

> un gilet croisé, un pantalon élargi du bas jusqu'à cacher ses fines chaussures, et un chapeau haut de forme[23] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 100).

It is worthy of note that, on the first evening of his stay, Meaulnes is somewhat more reticent in his dress, changing only his shoes and putting an overcoat on top of his own garb. By the second day of the fate, he has substituted all his own things for items of clothing belonging to the *domaine étrange*. The more engrossed in events he becomes, the less awareness he has, and disposition he assumes, of his old way of life. I would suggest that, similarly for the immersive reader, there is a progression of engagement and abandonment to the process which takes place, and that the sense of losing herself in the story is also incremental.

This process of letting go and enchantment is experienced by Meaulnes as being other-worldly: "Il ... se trouva comme transporté dans une journée de printemps"[24] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 100). So full is his immersion in the story unfolding, that Meaulnes even sees himself differently:

> Il s'aperçut lui-même reflété dans l'eau ... dans son costume d'étudiant romantique. Et il crut voir un autre Meaulnes; non plus l'écolier qui s'était évadé dans une carriole de paysan, mais un être charmant et romanesque, au milieu d'un beau livre de prix ...[25] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 101).

The person reflected back to him in the water is no longer a schoolboy playing truant from his classes, but a serious young man with a different identity, whom he does not recognise. It is as if he is seeing himself through other eyes, discovering a part of himself with which he is not familiar. The reader immersed in literary fiction, similarly, I discovered, loses herself in her novel to the degree that, temporarily, she is no longer in contact with her everyday self. As Rosenblatt attests, the aesthetic reader is "lead into a new world" (1994, p. 21) through the

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[23] The following day, just as he had been instructed, he donned a simple black suit of times gone by, with a fitted jacket and puffed shoulders, a checked waistcoat and trousers that were so wide at the bottom that they almost hid his stylish shoes, and a top hat.

[24] He felt himself transported to a spring day.

[25] He looked at himself reflected in the water, there in his romantic student clothing, and he saw a different Meaulnes; no longer the schoolboy who had truanted from school in the horse and cart, but a handsome, beguiling creature, the hero of a classical novel.

experience. I explore in depth in chapter seven this facility for transformation (Bollas, 1987).

As the boundaries blur, and Augustin increasingly absorbs himself in events at the *domaine étrange*, a strange phenomenon occurs. On the one hand he does not recognise himself, and yet, on the other, at some psychic level, he expects to be recognised/known by the wedding party. On that first morning of his stay: "Il sortit dans la cour du Domaine, pensant à chaque instant qu'une voix cordiale et joyeuse allait crier derrière lui: 'Déjà réveillé, Augustin?"[26] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 101). His expectation of being recognised by the party of strangers, I argue, comes about as a result of his having merged with events to such an extent that his sense of self is subsumed by them. He is so fully given over to the here-and-now that who he is is simply part of what is in front of him. On the one hand, he has lost himself in the experience before him, on the other hand, he has found himself.

This process is the hallmark of another paradox which I conclude is an intrinsic part of the immersive reading experience: that it provides a matrix in which the reader may simultaneously both lose and find herself. Winnicott theorises of the human desire to be private and uncommunicative, and yet at the same time wish to be discovered and known by another. He writes that "it is a joy to be hidden, but disaster not to be found" (1963b, p. 186). With her nose in a book, the reader gives a clear message that she is withdrawing from social interaction and wishes to hide herself away from daily life. In the process of immersion in her reading, she may be fortunate to find herself reflected back to her, her innermost thoughts revealed through the text, and in this way deeply known, whilst yet safely within the cocoon of her own psyche. Thus, she may both lose and find herself in the same experience (I discuss this further in chapter seven). There is concomitantly an active and passive dimension involved in this phenomenon. Meaulnes both

[26] He went out into the courtyard of the manor house, at any moment expecting to hear a friendly voice behind him saying: 'already up, Augustin?'.

actively removes his schoolboy clothing to don his carnival vestments, and passively allows his actions to be dictated by others, as he participates in the communal activities that follow. It is as if he allows himself to be taken over by the proceedings, joining wholeheartedly with the mêlée and leaving behind his old self.

I discuss in some depth in chapter four the issue of letting go, through consideration of the work of Marion Milner (1950/2010). She states: "This letting go ... involves an undoing of that split into subject and object which is the very basis of our logical thinking" (1956/1987a, pp. 195-196), recognising how extraordinary and counter-intuitive to Western cultural aspirations this is. In the words of Belgian literary critic, Georges Poulet: "The extraordinary fact in the case of a book is the falling away of the barriers between you and it. You are inside it; it is inside you; there is no longer either outside or inside. I am thinking the thoughts of another ... as my very own" (1969, pp. 55-56). Such merger, according to Milner, is not possible so long as the reader holds tenaciously to her sense of self, but only occurs as she abandons herself to her activity.

In order to engage fully with a work of literary fiction, I found that the reader must be able to let go, not only of everyday preoccupations and distractions, but also of her investment in her ego. To reverse the famous maxim of Freud (1937, p. 214)[27]: to be able to be a successful, immersive reader, *where ego was, there id should be*. In other words, the undefended, primitive, feeling self must be free to engage with what she reads. Here presents itself another curious paradox: that the literary and cognitive skills necessary for reading (including a sophisticated capacity for symbolic understanding) need to be juxtaposed with connection with the primitive self. This phenomenon is discussed in chapters two and five, and an argument advanced for the existence of what I am terming a ***sophisticated paranoid schizoid*** position, where advanced cognitive and symbolic understanding is simultaneously coupled with a capacity for engaging with primitive paranoid schizoid processes, as a development in Kleinian (1946, 1950) thinking.

[27] "Where id was, there ego shall be"

Meaulnes demonstrates the simultaneous juxtaposition of these two capacities. It is his skill in driving the cart, and competence in dealing with his horse, through which he finds his way to the mysterious domain. He exhibits a sophistication in his driving skills, witnessed by the ease François describes: "Je reconnais alors, dan cette forme noire qui tient les guides, un coude nonchalamment appuyé sur le côté de la voiture, à la façon paysanne, mon compagnon Augustin Meaulnes"[28] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 36). When the situation requires it, and he needs to increase his allure, as he perceives two men in pursuit of him, Meaulnes rises to the challenge in a very accomplished way: "Un pied sur le devant, dressé comme un conducteur de char romain, secouant à deux mains les guides, il lance sa bête à fond de train et disparaît en un instant de l'autre côté de la montée"[29] (p. 36). At a later point in his journey, when his mare develops a limp, Meaulnes shows great skill in investigating and diagnosing the problem, and then removing a stone which he finds lodged in her shoe:

> Il examina longuement le pied de la bête ... En gar expert au maniement du bétail, il s'accroupit, tenta de lui saisir le pied droit avec sa main gauche et de la placer entre ses genoux, mais il fut gêné par la voiture. A deux reprises, la jument se déroba et avança de quelque mètres. Le marchepied vint le frapper à la tête et la roue le blessa au genou. Il s'obstina et finit par triompher de la bête peureuse; mais le caillou se trouvait si bien enfoncé que Meaulnes dut sortir son couteau de paysan pour en venir à bout[30] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, pp. 62-63).

Without his accomplishment in these sophisticated capacities, he would never have attempted his escapade in the first place. His knowledge and expertise are prerequisites to provide the forum and the confidence to strike out into the unknown territory of the *domaine mystérieux*, in the same way as the reader requires a level of literacy and ability in reading, not simply converting the signs on the page

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[28] I recognised my companion, Augustin Meaulnes, as the figure dressed in black who was holding the reins, with his elbow nonchalantly leaning on the side of the cart, just like a local countryman.
[29] With one foot up on the front of the cart, like a Roman charioteer, shaking the reins with both hands, he launched his beast at full speed and in a flash had disappeared over the other side of the hill.
[30] He examined the mare's hoof closely ... accomplished in the care of livestock, he bent down and tried to catch her right foot in his left hand, and put it between his knees, but he was hampered by the carriage. Twice the mare got away and walked on a few metres. The footrest struck him on the head and the wheel injured his knee. He persevered and finally managed to calm the frightened animal; but the stone was so deeply entrenched, that he had to use his penknife to cut it out in the end.

into meaningful sentences, but also a capacity to understand the symbolic import of their content, before she can embark upon a psychic journey into her novel. She needs to draw on these scholarly skills whilst concomitantly divesting herself of her investment in her ego, so that she can enter the necessary state of merger with her text, which Milner describes as the "feeling of being one with the universe" (1956/1987a, p. 196), in the same way that Meaulnes, at the point of losing consciousness of his Self, allows himself to become one with the life going on around him, and thus merges unobtrusively with the crowd.

Imagination

In many ways, the whole of Meaulnes's escapade to the *vieux domaine étrange* may be construed as a flight of imagination. The first time I read the story I was not clear whether the estate shrouded in mists was an actual edifice (within the novel) or was all in Meaulnes's imagination. The whole interlude has a dreamlike quality about it. It has been suggested, and is interesting to note, that: "the difficulty of finding the place is explained by the fact that Meaulnes slept for a part of the time on his journeys to and from it: in quite a literal sense it is a dream world in that it is bounded by two sleeps" (March, 1941, p. 267). "Bracketed by lapses into sleep, Meaulnes's arrival and departure from the Mysterious Domain situate his experiences there as dream material subject to the usual processes of condensation, symbolization and displacement" (Ziegler, 2007, p. 137). I conclude that it is this dreamlike quality that typifies the state into which the reader descends at the point of reading, where conscious control is relinquished, and access is gained to unconscious material. Thus, the imagination creates images from the words on the page, which combine in the reader's reverie with personal associations and memories.

In the course of his journey to the *domaine perdu*, at times Meaulnes lapses into reverie, as the experience, and his psychic/emotional state triggers his memories:

> Glacé jusqu'aux moelles, il se rappela un rêve - une vision plutôt, qu'il avait eue tout enfant, et dont il n'avait jamais parlé à personne: un matin, au lieu de s'éveiller dans sa chambre, où pendaient ses culottes et ses paletots, il s'était trouvé dans une longue pièce verte, aux tentures pareilles à des feuillages. En ce lieu coulait une lumière si douce qu'on eût cru pouvoir la goûter. Près de la première fenêtre, une jeune fille cousait, le dos tourné, semblant attendre son réveil ... Il n'avait pas eu la force de se glisser hors de son lit pour marcher dans cette demeure enchantée. Il s'était rendormi ... Mais la prochaine fois, il jurait bien de se lever. Demain matin, peut-être!"[31] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 74).

Again, on his first night in the old manor house, Meaulnes enters a state of mental reverie where memories mingle with the present, stimulated by the sights and sounds that pertain in the attic bedroom:

> Il lui semble bientôt que le vent lui portait le son d'une musique perdue. C'était comme un souvenir plein de charme et de regret. Il se rappela le temps où sa mère, jeune encore, se mettait au piano l'après-midi dans le salon, et lui, sans rien dire, derrière la porte que donnait sur le jardin, il l'écoutait jusqu'à la nuit ...[32] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 80).

Similarly, taken up in the experience of the carnival, Meaulnes at times drifts into flights of fancy, as, on that first evening at the old manor house, when he sets eyes on Yvonne sitting at the piano, and sits, spellbound watching her and listening, as two children climb upon his knee: "Il put imaginer longuement qu'il était dans sa propre maison, marié, un beau soir, et que cet être charmant et inconnu qui jouiait du piano, près de lui, c'était sa femme ..."[33] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 99).

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[31] Frozen to the marrow, he remembered a dream - more of a vision really, which he used to have as a child, and which he'd never confided to anyone: one morning, instead of waking up in his bedroom, where his trousers and coats hung in the wardrobe, he found himself in a long room with walls as green as leaves. A gentle light was shining, so soft that you could almost taste it. Close to the first window, a young woman sat sewing, with her back turned, as if waiting for him to wake up ... he did not have the strength to slip out of bed to enter this enchanted place. He fell asleep again ... But next time, he swore he would get up. Tomorrow morning, perhaps ...!

[32] The wind seemed to ferry along the sound of music from the past. It was a memory, both enchanting and full of regret. He remembered a time when his mother, still young, would sit at the piano of an afternoon, while he would listen without saying a word, behind the door which led into the garden, until nightfall.

[33] He lingered over imagining that he was married, sitting in his own home, on a fine evening, and that the charming unknown being playing the piano close beside him, was his wife ...

The following morning, strolling through the grounds, he catches sight of his reflection in a pond: "Il s'aperçut lui-même reflété dans l'eau ... dans son costume d'étudiant romantique. Et il crut voir un autre Meaulnes; non plus l'écolier qui s'était évadé dans une carriole de paysan, mais un être charmant et romanesque, au milieu d'un beau livre de prix ..."[34] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 101). His imagination allows him to escape from his schoolboy persona and morph into a romantic hero. In much the same way, I conclude, the reader, in a dreamlike state, identifies with the heroes and heroines of literary fiction, and is transported in her imagination both to places unknown and familiar. I draw here, in particular, on the work of Gaston Bachelard, who, stressing the "primordial connection between the imagination and the material world" (Grimsley, 1971, p. 42), makes links to the archetypal awarenesses that are accessed through the engagement of the imagination in reading. He claims (1961b, 1968) that some of the pleasure of literary engagement is due to imaginative connection in the reader's psyche with archetypal memories of the concept of "home", which are evoked in the process.

Regression

I posit that a primitive part of the psyche is engaged in the process of successful immersive reading. While sophisticated literary and symbolic skills are *sine qua non*, they must combine with access to more primal mental states. That regression is a central facet of reading is evidenced both by the fact that in the process of being caught up in the story, the reader engages with primitive emotions, and by reason of the very process of reading itself replicating a regression to the container of the womb, and the concept of home. Immersive reading is a private, dyadic process, where the roles of container and contained (Bion, 1961, 1962; Cartwright, 2010) interchange in a complex matrix. While it is true that the reader contains the book, it is of primary significance that the reader is also contained by it, and in this latter capacity, regression to a primitive state is replicated.

[34] He looked at himself reflected in the water, there in his romantic student clothing, and he saw a different Meaulnes; no longer the schoolboy who had truanted from school in the horse and cart, but a handsome, beguiling creature, the hero of a classical novel.

Of great pertinence to an exploration of the links between regression and reading exemplified in *Le grand Meaulnes*, is the fact that it is children who play the major roles in the *fête étrange*, and, to a large extent, it is they who determine proceedings, as Meaulnes muses to himself: "... ce sont les enfants qui font la loi ici? Etrange domaine!"[35] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 78). Indeed, the main protagonists in the story "...Seurel, Yvonne, Valentine [Frantz's fiancée] and Frantz all see themselves and Meaulnes as children" (Brosman, 1971, p. 503), Yvonne herself saying to Augustin: "Nous sommes deux enfants; nous avons fait un folie"[36] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 109). Many of the emotions depicted and expressed are very childlike. Meaulnes's very first appearance in the novel (where he goes off exploring without telling his mother, or taking into account the etiquette required when boarding in the residence of another), as well as his initial decision to truant from school typify the carefree, irresponsible stance of a young teenager seeking thrills, without thought of the consequences or propriety of his actions. Allowing himself to be bewitched, not only by Yvonne but also her brother, Frantz, shows a recklessness and unthinking approach to events, and the passion with which he pursues her, and then later abandons her, in order to go to the assistance of Frantz, further magnifies these primitive drives.

At the point of reading, the reader is, similarly, without constraint or responsibility in the real world, and able to suspend the duties and concerns of everyday life, in favour of absorbing herself cognitively and emotionally in the alternative psychic space and other worldliness of her novel. More than simply at the level of freedom to connect meaningfully with the experiences of the *dramatis personae* of the story, however, is also the sense of recapturing a mental state from the past. The *domaine* which Meaulnes stumbles upon is referred to not only as "étrange" (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 65, et al.), but also "vieux"[37] (p. 151), and "perdu"[38] (p. 151), the implication being that it represents a primitive, lost, forgotten

[35] So, children make the rules around here? What a strange place!
[36] We are just two children. We have been foolish.
[37] old
[38] lost

space, but somewhere that has been known and belongs to the recesses of the past. Metaphorically, "[t]he dark, secret place can symbolize the return to the womb" (Brosman, 1971, p. 503), and this is implied in Alain-Fournier's imagery, and why, I believe, Meaulnes's quest to re-find the lost domain is so compelling.

Bachelard (1969) makes a very important contribution to this debate, claiming that archetypal images of home evoke benign primitive memories, not of an individual childhood house or setting, but of the psychic state associated with the primal concept of home. He recognises that every individual starts life enclosed and protected (in the womb) and that archetypal images of home re-evoke these primal memories of being safe and protected, bringing with them a concomitant sense of wellbeing (Hans, 1977). My belief is that this primitive state is also evoked in the process of reading, and, further, that the nature of the relationship between the prenatal mother/child dyad is replicated in the process of the reader reading. The book, understood as Bollas's "transformational object" (1987, p. 16), fulfilling for the reader a similar containing function as the mother for her infant, is the matrix by which reading can become a transformative process.

Transformation

Meaulnes is so profoundly touched by his experience in the *domaine étrange*, that he returns to his school life transformed. It has served as something of a rite of passage, as he begins his adventure as a naive adolescent, and comes back as a young man. He starts out as a thrill-seeker, perhaps wanting to impress his schoolmates by his daring prank, acting precipitately and impulsively, but on his return seeks understanding of what has happened to him, by thinking about it and wanting to gain knowledge, not just of the terrain he has covered, but also of the meaning of the whole experience.

During his time away, he pledges his heart to a young woman: "... enfin il osa lui demander la permission de revenir un jour vers ce beau domaine: 'je vous

attendrai' répondit-elle simplement"[39] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 109), and makes a solemn vow to help out a young man in mortal distress, responsibilities that he does not have in the carefree days before his escapade, and which change him as a person and his outlook on life. Such is his commitment to come to Frantz's aid, that he allows it completely to override his own happiness with the woman he loves. Where now is the fun-loving, hedonistic youth, out to impress his schoolmates with his bravado? Over the course of his immersion in his experiences in the *domaine perdu*, Augustin has been transformed.

Although he remains thereafter a melancholy soul, weighed down with the sorrows of the world, broken relationships, lost dreams, and an insatiable desire to recapture the paradise he has lost, he does father a child, and life continues with her, forward into the future. That which is spawned between reader and the experience of what is read, I conclude, likewise, is a unique creation within the reader and goes forward with her, as she is changed by it.

To think about the phenomenon of the transformation of the reader, I discuss in chapter seven in particular the work of Bollas (1978, 1987). Building on the notion that a state of regression is a necessary part of the literary reading process, together with Milner's (1950/2010) thinking about merger, I am mindful of Bollas's description of ".... the sense of being reminded of something never cognitively apprehended but existentially known, the memory of the ontogenetic process rather than thought or phantasies that occur once the self is established" (Bollas, 1987, p. 16). He goes on to clarify: "Such aesthetic moments do not sponsor memories of a specific event or relationship but evoke a psychosomatic sense of fusion that is the subject's recollection of the transformational object" (1987, p. 16). In other words, the environment pertaining in the process of successful, immersive reading, serves effectively as a transference to the primal situation between the mother/baby dyad. In the same way as the mother serves as a transformational

[39] At last he plucked up the courage to ask her permission to return to the beautiful domain. 'I will be waiting for you' she replied simply.

object for her offspring by providing that containing environment through which transformation can occur, so the reading experience might be construed as re-evoking that dyadic encounter through which the reader is changed. As Bollas puts it: "The uncanny pleasure of being held by a poem, a composition, a painting, or … any object, rests on those moments when ***the infant's internal world is partly given form by the mother*** …" (Bollas, 1987, p. 32, italics mine). The key point is that the reader's mental processes are stimulated by the thoughts of another (the text that she is reading), and, whilst engaged in that process, she connects with an existential memory of having been in that state of feeding from the mother's thoughts and cognitive processing, and through that connection can be transformed.

Reintegration

In a letter to his friend, Rivière (March, 1941, p. 272), Alain-Fournier wrote: "Mais un homme qui a fait une fois un bond dans le Paradis, comment pourrait-il s'accomoder ensuite de la vie de tout le monde?"[40]. This was Meaulnes's dilemma, having visited the paradise of the lost domain, and can also be the experience of the reader, transported to an idyllic state of fusion in her process of reading, to have to wrench herself away to attend to daily duties, or at the end of a book, to have to leave it behind.

Once the fete is summarily ended, Meaulnes has to make haste to join the party of guests leaving the manor house, in order to secure a lift. "Il se déshabilla, et se rhabilla vivement, mais, distraitement, déposa sur une chaise ses habits d'emprunt, se trompant de gilet"[41] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 115). Once back at the schoolhouse, it is François who notices: "Je vis qu'il portait, au lieu du petit gilet à boutons de cuivre, qui était d'uniforme sous le paletot, un étrange gilet de soie

[40] How can someone who has once connected with Paradise possibly then return to everyday life?

[41] He removed his carnival clothes, and re-dressed quickly, but distractedly, putting his borrowed attire on a chair, and put on the wrong waistcoat.

…"[42] (p. 52). "[C]ette pièce mystérieuse d'un costume ... n'était pas le sien"[43] (p. 54). So, although Augustin is bodily present back at school in Sainte-Agathe, he is not completely restored to his schoolboy status, this lingering item of clothing, a relic symbolising the part of him that is not reintegrating into his old life.

His reluctance to return to school is evidenced by the conductor of the carriage having to prompt him to dismount: "Il va falloir descendre ici"[44] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 122), whilst Augustin "... ne s'était pas encore arraché de son sommeil ... comme pour se rendormir"[45] (p. 122). He resists having to awaken and come back to earth, much as the reader might have to force herself to interrupt her reading and return to real life.

Even towards the end of the novel, when Meaulnes has, seemingly, got on with his life, he still reflects back on the experience of his escapade, and, on the day after his wedding, at a time when one would have expected him to be enjoying the newfound happiness of married bliss, makes a surprising claim "... j'en suis persuadé maintenant, lorsque j'avais decouvert le Domaine sans nom, j'étais à une hauteur, à un degré de perfection et de pureté que je n'atteindrai jamais plus. Dans la mort seulement … je retrouverai peut-être la beauté de ce temps-là"[46] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 239). So compelling has been his other-worldly experience that it appears to preclude his being able to reintegrate fully into normal life forever thereafter.

I am suggesting sometimes a similarly powerful pull is experienced by the reader, such that the psychic space which she inhabits at the point of reading creates a lasting longing to seek it out as an idyllic state, and can preclude a willingness to

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[42] I noticed that, underneath his overcoat, instead of the regulation school uniform waistcoat with little leather buttons, he was wearing an unusual silk waistcoat.
[43] This mysterious piece of clothing did not belong to him.
[44] You have to get down here.
[45] Had not yet properly woken from his sleep ... as if he wanted to continue sleeping.
[46] I am totally persuaded that when I found the domain with no name, I was at such a height, a degree of perfection and purity that I shall never recapture. Only in death will I perhaps be able to find the beauty of that time again.

be available to everyday life. Of course, the ultimate outworking of this desire would be psychic retreat (Steiner, 1993), which is driven by a need to protect from unbearable anxiety, but wherein reality is also avoided. Reading affords the opportunity to withdraw temporarily from the pressures of life, and might, therefore, be characterised as a healthy kind of psychic retreat, providing a transient withdrawal from stress. I explore more fully in chapter nine my own experience of where, as with Meaulnes, the pull to remain in the alternative consciousness of the reading state overrides the capacity to engage with life.

Ownership

This brings me to consider another key aspect of the reader's experience exemplified clearly in Meaulnes's story, namely the issue of ownership of the experience. Whilst I engage in chapter six with a full discussion about the intersubjective nature of immersive literary reading, there exists a further, rather less palatable, dynamic pertaining to the psychic violence of the reader. I am mindful of De Certeau's description of readers as "… travellers [who] … move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves" (1984, p. 174), and turn now to explore this question in relation to my portal novel.

On his return to school following his escapade, Meaulnes is deeply possessive and secretive about his adventure, divulging the details of it only to François, his confidant, and jealously withholding particulars from the other boys at school. It is ***his*** creation, ***his*** experience and he is fiercely protective of it, wanting to preserve his ownership of it and resistant to sharing the experience with others, almost as if in some way this would cheapen it, the sense of mystery needing to be guarded. When classes are over for lunchbreak on the day of his return, François, the narrator, reports that Augustin "se précipita dans la grande classe, où je le suivis, et referma la porte vitrée juste à temps pour supporter l'assaut de ceux qui

nous poursuivaient[47]" (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 47). When the pursuers attempt to break through the closed door, "Meaulnes, au risque de se blesser à son anneau brisé, avait tourné la petite clef qui fermait la serrure[48]" (p. 47). So strong is his desire to preserve the sanctity of his experience from the marauding schoolboys, that he risks cutting himself in order to lock the door to keep them out. Returning to the classroom after lunch, having successfully evaded his peers' first attempt at intrusion, Meaulnes sets to poring over a map he finds in the master's desk when his classmates, headed up by Jasmin Delouche again set upon him. Again, he fiercely protects his privacy and reacts aggressively to this intrusion, intuiting a sense of threat from would-be onlookers. "A son entrée, Meaulnes leva la tête et, les sourcils froncés, cria aux gars qui se précipitaient sur le poêle, en se bousculant: 'on ne peut donc pas être tranquille une minute ici![49]'" (p. 49).

At the end of the story, after Meaulnes has married Yvonne, but deserted her on their wedding night to pursue the call of Frantz, he finally returns to learn that his wife died in childbirth and that François has been caring for his little daughter. Here he further demonstrates his sense of proprietorship by claiming the child, as if she were his sole creation, whisking her away as his possession, without thought for François's or the child's feelings and the loss they would feel being summarily separated in this way. François has developed a close bond with the little girl (now one year old) and regards her in a fatherly way, such that he confesses the not unreasonable assumption: "Je me disais parfois: sans doute … sera-t-elle un peu mon enfant[50]" (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 335). On Meaulnes's return, François is left bereft, feeling heavily the loss of the child for whom he had developed such an affection. He opines: "La seule joie que m'eût laissé le grand Meaulnes, je sentais bien qu'il était revenue pour me la prendre[51]" (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 338).

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[47] ran into the main school room, whither I followed him, and shut the door just in time to keep out the boys who were pursuing us

[48] at the risk of hurting himself on his broken ring, Meaulnes turned the key to lock the door

[49] As he entered, Meaulnes looked up, scowling, and yelled at the youths who bustled towards the fire: 'can't a person have a minute's peace here'

[50] I would sometimes say to myself: without doubt …she is, in a sense, my child.

[51] I realised that Meaulnes had come to deprive me of the only joy that he had left me.

For Augustin, wrapped up as he is in his own feelings, there is no thought for the Other and the pain he might be inflicting by wrenching apart these two souls, the violence of his self-interest and appropriation is clear. De Certeau's (1984) metaphor of readers as poachers is amply played out by Meaulnes, asserting his right to his child, taking full ownership of her, and riding roughshod over those in his way. He is mindful only that she is ***his*** creation, as a reader might appropriate the text, wanting, at the point of reading, to cut out the writer from consciousness and claim authorship for the whole herself.

In my own reading experience, I find an antipathy to those novels where I am addressed directly by the author and reminded that I am (only) a reader and not a protagonist, in other words where attention is drawn to the process of reading and so the spell of immersion in the text is broken. From Charlotte Bronte's fairly innocuous "Reader, I married him" (1847/1992, p. 544), to Calvino's more intrusive comments, such as: "You have now read about thirty pages and you're becoming caught up in the story" (1980/1998, p. 25), or indeed Sterne's: "I insist upon it that you read the two following chapters .... When this is done … we will go on with the midwife" (1759-1767/2009, p. 17), I experience an irritation about being addressed directly. It is as if the author is staking his/her claim to ownership of the story, reminding the reader that she is a third party observer rather than a creator. It is an unwelcome Oedipal intrusion into the dyadic bond I experience with the text.

What I am discussing here, with regard to Meaulnes's appropriation of his daughter, however, is a phenomenon beyond that of Oedipal intrusion (the incursion of a third party into a close dyadic relationship), and one that, I believe, relates to a much earlier, narcissistic mental state, (Winnicott, 1969), where the infant perceives mastery over the mother and senses herself as merged with her: that stage where the breast magically appears when she is hungry, where comfort appears as if from nowhere when she wills it, and the baby has an omnipotent sense that she has made this happen without any awareness of the alterity of mother/caregiver and the part the latter has to play in the exchange.

I write in chapter five of my belief that the reader's relationship to her literary text reflects a reversal of normal developmental psychic processes from object usage to object relating (Winnicott, 1953, 1969, 1971), that, rather than the Other starting out as a subjective construction of the individual and developing into a separate entity with its own characteristics, in reading the Other (the characters in the novel) begins as objectively construed, but morphs with every reading into an idiosyncratic subjective creation of each individual reader. The characters in, for example, *Crime and punishment* (Dostoevsky, 1866/2000), exist on the page and have done since the middle of the nineteenth century. They do not, however, come alive until the text is read by the reader, at which point they become creations of the reader. Raskolnikov has as many (mental) incarnations as the number of readers who have read of his exploits over the last 154 years, each individual reader holding fast to her own construction of him in her imagination. It is this sense of ownership which underlies the phenomenon I am discussing, of the reader's aggressive, parthenogenetic appropriation of the text.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have set out, through my portal novel of Alain-Fournier's *Le grand Meaulnes* (1913/1971), and through the person of its eponymous hero, some key themes of my thesis, which are explored at greater depth in the ensuing chapters. Augustin Meaulnes is the reader. His adventure in truanting from school and discovering a mysteriously inaccessible lost domain, I liken to the experience of the immersive reader of literary fiction, who in the process of reading also inhabits a strange, alternative psychic space. Meaulnes's attitude to life, embracing the personal qualities of curiosity and fearlessness, propels him into his adventure, in much the same way as the mental stimulation, epistemic impulse and open-mindedness of the reader are the vehicles through which she reaches other worlds in the process of reading. I consider that one of the principal attractions of reading is found in the state of curiousness which pertains in the reader in the act of reading. Over and above the curiosity which propels her to absorb the narrative and wrestle with clues in the plot from which she derives cognitive satisfaction, the

reader enjoys the chronic ***state of being curious*** which is endemic in the process of reading. Such a state of mind Meaulnes demonstrates throughout the novel.

I have raised the issue also of how Meaulnes's proficiency in driving the carriage and handling horses are the literal and metaphorical vehicle through which he is able to make his escape, in a similar vein to the way in which the reader's competence in literacy skills and sophisticated symbolic capacity are what transport her into the other land/alternative mental space of reading. At the same time, Augustin's ability to abandon himself to, and participate in, that which is going on around him demonstrate a childlike quality of trust which enables him to feel the emotion and not hold back from enjoyment. Simultaneous access to such a primitive emotional space is also paramount for the reader. The juxtaposition of these two mental states I am terming a ***sophisticated paranoid schizoid position,*** and I present an argument that this is the hallmark of the reading space.

I have noted how the reader's experience of being enchanted by her book, and abandoning herself to the story mentally unfolding before her is mirrored in Meaulnes's ability to allow himself to be transported by the *domaine étrange*, and lose himself within its confines, divesting himself of his schoolboy identity, and assuming a different *persona*. Drawing on Milner's (1950/2010, 1956/1987) work, I maintain that, for the reader, total abandonment of the self and the ego to the task in hand is *sine qua non* to a satisfactory reading experience.

A companion theme to that of abandonment, and part of the chain of signifiers I have selected, which I introduce in this chapter, is that of regression, and I discuss how the nature of her relationship to the process of reading and her immersion in it, mirrors in the reader the primitive experience of the mother/child dyad. The ability to be carefree and without responsibility towards the outcome of what is taking place in the novel replicates in the reader that early psychic state, where mother/text is the container and provides the facilitating matrix through which the child/reader is able to reconnect with early experiences of being held

whilst in a state of carefree abandon, with no compunction to take responsibility for outcomes. I show how the principal protagonists in the story of *Le grand Meaulnes* are children, or childlike, and Augustin himself, in the course of the narrative, allows himself to be led, whilst also being seduced by the sense of seeking to recapture a lost land.

Developing themes from the work of Gaston Bachelard (1969), I discuss the use of reader imagination in this regressed state, to recapture a primal connection with the cosmos, which brings with it an accompanying sense of well-being. For Meaulnes, the *domaine étrange* represents a lost childhood idyll, which is, *ipso facto*, compelling. For the reader, the psychic state evoked in the process of reading, I propound, similarly echoes this blissful connection with archetypal innocence.

In the process of engaging with events in the lost domain, Augustin's thoughts are full of reminiscences of childhood memories, and such reveries, I note, also typify the reader's experiences when engrossed in her novel. The lifting of unconscious control and censorship give free rein to accessing unconscious connections and memories which are evoked from the script, which complement the reader's imagination of the Other and make very personal links to her own autobiography.

Such experiences also, I suggest, have the potential to be transformative. The Augustin Meaulnes who returns to school at the end of his adventure, is a different person from the boy who left some few days previously. The reader who allows herself to engage at depth with her novel, making unconscious connections with her own history and with existential memories of the cosmos, is changed by the process. I draw on the work of Bollas (1978, 1987) to consider the question of the transformational object and its relevance to the reading of literary fiction.

The final process highlighted through the story of Meaulnes is that of the psychic violence of the reader, her possessiveness of what she reads being

construed as her own parthenogenetic creation. This points back to the strong (primitive) dyadic connection between reader and text, into which any Oedipal intrusion is unwelcome. This idea needs to be held in tension with the question of the intersubjectivity of reader and text, which is discussed in chapter six.

Chapter four: Letting go

In this chapter, I explore my finding that, in the experience of immersive literary reading, the reader enters into a deep, quasi-hypnotic, state of merger with her text, reminiscent of early connection with a maternal figure. I found that the reader requires an ability psychically to let go at a deep level of connection with the constructs of self which typify her daily interactions; that she must be prepared and able to relinquish ego control, as well as her attachment to her own personal transferences, in order to allow herself to lose herself in what she is reading, give herself over to what may emerge unconsciously in the process and through that reading, potentially be transformed. In a reversal of the normal maturational processes that accompany psychic development (Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975; Winnicott, 1990) and the move from an initial total dependence on caregiver to a position of individual autonomy, I conclude that the reader must have the capacity to dissolve boundaries between self and other, reality and fiction, past and present, and merge with, and be present to, the experience of reading her text in a unique way. From having an established identity as a self, a *me*, the successful immersive reader must actively cede this position, and allow herself to lose her ***self*** and become temporarily part of that *not-me* (Winnicott, 1953) which she is reading. Milner (1934/1952), on whose ideas this chapter mainly draws, refers in this connection to the need to bring wide attention, rather than narrow attention to bear, reflecting an openness to the *not-me*, and willingness to surrender investment in the individual ego position.

I start the chapter by demonstrating the transformational potential of the reader's capacity to let go and relinquish ego control in this way, through discussion of some examples of my own reading experience. I then go on to think more phenomenologically about the process of letting go, initially through my portal novel, *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971), and later introducing other literary exemplars of readers achieving this state (*inter alia*, Woolf's (1927/2002) *To the lighthouse*), and failing to do so (Tolstoy's (1877/1999) *Anna Karenina*), in order to

draw together some corollary of the nature of the (external and intrapsychic) environment necessary to achieve this requisite state of merged consciousness.

My personal reading experience

I start with some personal illustrations. Studying the journals I have kept over the last three years of my own literary reading experience has revealed a very interesting therapeutic process in connection with the phenomenon of letting go in the Milnerian sense under discussion: I discovered that when I have successfully attained this state (and I have not managed to do so on every occasion that I have picked up a literary text), more often than not, I have had important insights into my own life story, as a result of seeing it from an Other point of view, and not just academic insights, life-changing insights that have altered the way I feel/relate to those events at a deep psychic level. These epiphanies have brought healing into old wounds to an extent that I have not even experienced during many years of personal psychotherapy.

When I have been reading a narrative that has resonances with my own autobiography, if I have been able to take a wide perspective (Milner, 1934/1952) and relinquish my investment in the way I personally identify with certain characters (and thus adhere to a fixed standpoint on the story), and merge with the narrative/events in a more fluid way, what emerges is a reappraisal of that situation, a concomitant profound empathic understanding of the other and a deeper degree in being able to let go of past hurts also. I have found that there needs to be a personal transference of some kind to the narrative in the first instance (whether a simple event like the writing/reading of a letter in emotional circumstances, or a more obvious resonance with major life story events), in order for deeper connection to be possible, and, therefore, for the letting go to be at a profound level. I cite three key examples.

The first of these relates to my experience whilst reading *The French lieutenant's woman* (Fowles, 1969/2004). I recorded in my reading journal my

thoughts and feelings, highlighting what, in retrospect, appear to be the significant points in italics:

> I was gripped … and had not lost faith with the writing, though irritated by both the central protagonists and ***having lost empathy for most of the characters***.
>
> ***I found Charles weak and was willing him all the time to walk away from the perfidious Miss Woodruff (Sarah)***. Each time he relapsed I wanted his moral rectitude and decency to win the upper hand (I wanted the novel's first ending to be the correct one). The scarlet woman I found despicable, and, once having uncovered her manipulation, any empathy I had for her (initially perceiving her the victim of another's cruelty) disappeared. My sympathy was with the jilted Ernestina.
>
> It was not until I finished the book and sat thoughtfully for a few minutes, that I realised my own proactive countertransferential links. For, was not Sarah in all reality my ex-husband's lover, who preyed upon and exploited his sexual weakness for her own ends. She knew exactly how to hook him by getting pregnant… All the time I read the story, I did not consciously make the connections, but now I wonder that I didn't see it. ***I did have empathy for Charles. He was a good, decent sort, inhibited in his sexuality because of convention, but vulnerable to seduction.***

The salient aspect here is not so much that, at the point of reading, I was initially blind to the autobiographical connections in the story, but the response to Charles that was evoked in me. Even after many years, and many years of psychotherapy also, at some unconscious level I still harboured a sense of feeling aggrieved and having been wounded by my former husband's affair with his then lover. Had I been asked, I would have asserted that I had processed what happened between us and owned my part in the break-up of our marriage, but there was still an attachment somewhere to a sense of victimhood. I felt wronged. When I unconsciously revisited events through immersion in this novel, I discovered within myself a real empathy for Charles, the chief protagonist. I wrote that he was a "good, decent sort". His kindness it was that led him to fall prey to Miss Woodruff's wiles. The same might be said of my ex-husband, who was a kind man; he was sensitive to the pain of others and generally well-intentioned (even if at times, clearly, gullible). He was not a beast or a villain and found himself in a double bind of a situation before he realised what was happening. I think this was the first time that I felt such understanding for him and for his side of the tangle we experienced,

and this, in its turn enabled me to release my residual anger towards him. All of this came about, quite unexpectedly, through being able to lose myself in Fowles's novel. Had I read it only at a more superficial level of cognitive understanding and not abandoned myself to it, nor taken time to write up and reflect upon my experience[52], I do not believe I would have had that healing epiphany.

My second significant reading moment of this kind also related to events surrounding the break-up of my marriage. This time the novel I was reading was George Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859/1997), and it was another short vignette from the narrative that rocked my world. My journal at the time read:

> Following Adam and Arthur's fight over Hetty, I come to the part where Arthur has to write her a letter ... and I am gone into my own reverie. As I read of Arthur's distress, thinking of Hetty's distress when she reads the letter, I am transported back to [our former home], and, myself reading ***that*** fateful letter from [my husband], while he sat and watched me. It was not all that emotional on this occasion to think of that, although there were pangs, but what surprised me more than anything, was the power of reverie and the idea that yet again what I am reading is related to me. Is every novel the story of my life? Am I interwoven in the pages of every author's writing? I suppose the answer to these (rhetorical) questions, is yes! Because it is I, the reader, who am reading. I, with my history and associations, adding a richness to the experience of whatever I read.

My later reflections on this experience took me to a place similar to that in the previous example, where I was surprised to notice that my sympathies lay with Arthur, and not Hetty. He was the one who had been unfaithful, and yet as he wrestled with his conscience to break the truth to her, it was his integrity I admired, and he the object of my compassion. The incident I remembered from my own history echoed this scenario when, seemingly out of the blue one day, my ex-husband falteringly and nervously presented me with a letter in which he disclosed his infidelity. Even though it began: "This is the hardest letter I have ever had to write ...", until the point of such a profound letting go of self whilst engrossed in reading *Adam Bede*, I had never deeply considered how it must have felt for my husband, nor what agonies he was going through at the time, so overwhelmed was

[52] I explore the process of transformation more fully in chapter seven

I by my own shock and distress. Again, the experience of letting go of the self through reading literary fiction was the gateway which brought me a newfound freedom from my trauma of yesteryear and a degree of empathy and understanding for my ex-husband that I had not before experienced around that incident. The key was in the fact that in that moment of reading, I had moved away from a personal interpretation of the story to a more global sense of the happenings as a matrix of relationships that merged into a whole.

Although my husband and I had attempted to stay together following the incident of the letter, marking the start of his adultery, the death knell of our relationship came some several months later when his lover announced she was pregnant. I experienced this news as a body blow. It was probably the most traumatising of all the experiences we went through at that time. Healing came into this part of our story through the third example of my immersive reading experience, when I abandoned myself to the novel *The age of innocence* (Wharton, 1920/1999). I recorded in my journal:

> In terms of my own reverie, I had a heart-stopping moment at the point where May [the wife] announced her pregnancy: the sense that all was now lost for Newland Archer (if he were serious about making a future with Ellen Olenska). All along I was rooting for the wife and not the (potential) mistress. However, the sense of "now there is a baby involved, it's all over for Ellen and Newland" had such strong resonances for me with [my husband] and [his lover]'s baby. The novel was a mixture of these two roles (wife v mistress) and the pregnancy. At the point of reading that, my allegiances were blurred, and my sense of with whom to identify confused. I think I dropped that sense of individual identification (which had also been mostly strongly pro-May, the wife), and feeling her graciousness as she tolerated his indiscretion - knowing about it in her heart and yet not berating him and rising above. I was impressed and moved by that and interestingly did ***not*** think it hypocritical (even though, of course, it was), and I merged with goings on ***from a position of no personal interest***, and yet with a great deal of personal resonance.

The narrative of Newland Archer, his wife, May, and his lover, Ellen, had all the elements of my own story but in a different constellation, such that my sense of merger was with the plot and blurred from character to character. It was strongly evocative of my own situation, and yet circumstantially different. It was the wife in

Wharton's novel who carried the trump card, whereas the reverse was true in my own life. The man in the middle was something of a pawn, who struggled to commit to infidelity (and never quite managed it) whilst maintaining an outward allegiance to his wife and the etiquette of the age and society in which he lived, and in my story my husband ultimately decided to go with his paramour (and the baby). Ambivalence and split loyalties hallmarked the existence of both men.

I was profoundly affected by this book, and I think it was partly because, in losing myself to it, I was able to connect with a new configuration of my experiences, no longer so invested in my own personal perspective, but able to see things from a wider angle, to incorporate all parties involved. Up until this point, news of the conception of my husband's love child was the ultimate betrayal and tragedy of my life, and I could say, like Milner, that "whatever I did, I seemed never able to forget myself" (Field/Milner, 1934/1952, p. 22). By being immersed, however, in Wharton's saga of Newland Archer, I was enabled to view things more from the point of view of the other players also, rather than just my unique perspective, and came to see not only that my husband, rather than just unfaithful, was in many ways also a victim of his own desires, weakness and behaviour, whose life and reputation were permanently scarred by these events, but also that there is a much bigger picture than that of the individual, and this awareness has introduced to me a sense of expansiveness which has been very liberating.

The type of letting go to which Milner refers is "... a letting go of the discriminating capacities which distinguish differences ... a state of blissful transcending of boundaries, which, to the conscious ego, would be identified with madness" (1950/2010, p. 175). To relinquish one's own identity in this way, then, might be construed as psychotic, where normal processes of maturation and individuation (which pathway the Western individual is encouraged to pursue as the ultimate in sophistication) are revoked. My experience in being able to relinquish my fast-held ego position at these points in my immersive reading practice opened up a whole new panorama to me. Milner's words also capture this,

in her description of: "the sudden moments when one's whole perception of the world changes — changes that happen, sometimes apparently out of the blue, but sometimes as the result of a deliberate shift of attention, one that makes the whole world seem newly created" (Milner, 1972/1987c, p. 249). Certainly, my whole perception of the events in question changed, so that my world felt newly created. Indubitably this happened out of the blue to the extent that I was not seeking this particular outcome to my reading experience. There was a deliberate shift of attention, without doubt, but further than this, a change of consciousness, the shift being from the more conscious to the more unconscious, and from ego-awareness into what Milner (1950/2010, p. 181) describes as "... a plunge into no-differentiation". She goes on to qualify the outcome of this as " ... result[ing] … in a re-emerging into a new division of the me-not-me, one in which there is more of the *me* in the *not-me* and more of the *not-me* in the *me*" (Milner, 1950/2010, p. 181). My experience of being able to engage with, and combine with, the *not-me* in the reading vignettes described above has been profoundly healing and led to a more benign view of the Other, and a less polarised understanding of those relationships.

In contemplating these revelation experiences as a result of deeply letting go and engaging with the *not-me* in the process of reading, I wrote in my journal:

> Interestingly, I want to have more epiphany moments, and yet, the very fact that I might be seeking them means that I am attached to them and so not let go. My self/ego is invested somewhere in finding these revelations, and so I am no longer free in the same way to let the process take me wherever it wants to. … I suppose in the same way one cannot find happiness when one pursues it as an aim, it, rather, is a by-product of doing other things, a bonus along the way.

I was writing this at the time of reading a novel (Elena Ferrante's *The story of the lost child*, 2015) with which I was struggling to engage at a deep level and feeling myself irritated by the lack of satisfaction it afforded. I had been so moved and excited by the transformational experience of reading, inter alia, *The age of innocence* (Wharton, 1920/1999), that I longed to replicate it in my next novel. In musing upon my journal entry, I realised that it corroborated Milner's (1934/1952, 1950/2010) position, in that as soon as I, as reader, became attached to a particular outcome from that

pastime, that personal investment precluded me from being able to abandon myself completely to the process. Ironically, ***attachment to the concept and capacity of letting go, meant I was unable to do so***.

This resonates with earlier comments regarding *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971) (chapter three), that Augustin's conscious efforts actively to recapture his experience at the *domaine mystérieux,* are flawed, and once the manor house is located, it loses its thrill and mystery in the absence of the immersive experience of psychic letting go to the experience. I could no more decide that I want to transform a past hurt through the medium of reading a novel, as the very act of seeking to do so means that I retain control. The key, I conclude, is in the relinquishing of the ego's position whilst engaging in the process.

I now revisit elements of the story of *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971) to focus more explicitly the phenomenology of letting go. The truanting escapade of Augustin Meaulnes turns into the pivotal experience that it becomes in the novel, because he is able to give himself over to it completely. Although initially his thoughts are more about the freedom of having escaped ***from*** his schoolwork for the afternoon, attaining his eventual (though unforeseen) destination, it becomes about what he has escaped ***to*** that is preoccupying. The literary fiction reader may initially seek out her novel as a means of respite from the duties and mundanity of the daily grind, but the true pleasure comes once she is engrossed and immersed in its pages, when she loses all sense of what she has left behind and merges with her narrative. The fiction becomes her predominant reality, the place ***to*** which she has escaped. For however long the reading episode lasts, for it to be a satisfactory experience, I discovered that she needs to give herself over to it in such a way as to lose all sense of self, whilst, ironically, unconsciously processing constructs of self and her experiences through her novel.

Initially there may be a process of acclimatisation, where the reader is more consciously focusing on the words she is reading, but with sufficient capacity to let

go and give herself to it, she will quickly find herself absorbed and taken over by it. On reaching the old manor house (*domaine perdu*), Meaulnes is initially reticent, his curiosity propelling him only cautiously into the periphery of the proceedings going on around him. Tired after a broken night's sleep in the open air, he seeks out a place to rest and happens upon a bedroom in the attic, where he anticipates being undisturbed and having the opportunity to sleep. Like the reader, Meaulnes's intention is rest. Bidden, however, by the solicitation of an unknown bohemian character and his accomplice who enter the room, he is awoken and invited to don the vestments draped over the chair and to join in the festivities. He is hungry and he has an appetite for adventure, and quickly talks himself into acquiescence. The immersive reader who is similarly of a mind and willingness to engage, I suggest, may also be said to divest herself of her old clothing (identity) and assume the mantle of reader, or participant/observer in what is presented to her, merging with the narrative. This is a deliberate choice and involves a conscious act on the part of the reader to go deeper into her reading experience, just as Meaulnes had actively to clothe himself in the vestments placed before him[53].

He loses no time in doing so, overlaying the party clothing on top of his school uniform. He then unapologetically merges with the sea of faces in the dining room and sets about sharing the meal with them. He has a literal and metaphorical appetite for engaging in the proceedings and tucks in with enthusiasm, happy to leave behind all thoughts of his schoolboy life. The task for the literary fiction reader, similarly, I conclude, is to allow herself to merge with her reading, laying aside her own life concerns for the time.

It is interesting to note that a deeper degree of immersion has happened by the following day, as it transpires, and Meaulnes's reticence of the previous night, when he merely changed his shoes and donned an overcoat on top of his own clothes, has been forgotten, as he dresses himself entirely in the costume of the carnival, with garments belonging to the *domaine étrange*. He has divested himself

[53] The process itself of transformation is discussed further in chapter seven.

completely of his own schoolboy identity and assumed an *alter ego* in line with the other wedding guests. As he allows himself to be taken over, to become engrossed in the proceedings, he lets go of the preoccupations of his old life, and throws in his lot with the assembled company, becoming fully a part of events.

In her celebrated thesis, Marion Milner (1950/2010) writes of the imperative of letting go in order to be able to paint, diarising her own experiences of consciously trying to draw and paint, seeking out instructions and techniques to help her along the way, all of which failed and brought her to the conclusion that the key was in being able to let go and abandon herself to the pastime, allowing her unconscious to guide her hand as she put brush to canvas. In ceasing to focus attention on herself and her abilities, a creative blurring of boundaries between self and other facilitated her creativity. She writes: "This letting go ... involves an undoing of that split into subject and object which is the very basis of our logical thinking" (Milner, 1956/1987a, pp. 195-196). It is something of this ability to lose the self which I discovered is imperative for the successful immersive reader, and which is incrementally exemplified in Augustin Meaulnes's losing of himself in the *domaine étrange*.

As he loosens his identification with his old self, so he is able to assume a different, unfamiliar identity so fully that, on catching sight of his reflection, he is surprised by what he sees. He has become that character from fiction. No longer the truanting schoolboy prankster, Meaulnes has actually become this serious, romantic, adult figure, to the point that he does not even recognise himself. Similarly, at the point of total connection with her novel, the reader becomes comfortably unaware of herself, as her attention is elsewhere, to the point that, were she to see her reading self in representation, it would be unfamiliar.

Boundaries blur between the past and the present, self and other, reality and fiction, so that Augustin, merged in the unfolding narrative of the wedding party, loses his capacity to distinguish his 'schoolboy self' from his '*domaine étrange* self'.

There is yet a sense of familiarity even in this strange place, where, not only is he merged with the world of the *domaine mystérieux*, but he also expects that the characters in it are merged with him, and familiar with him. On the first morning of his stay, he goes out into the courtyard, half expecting someone to address him by name. His expectation is that the environment (the other characters in the scenario) already know him, rather than being aware of himself as a guest or an observer. Boundaries are fluid, and Meaulnes finds an impression of familiarity in amongst the strangeness and a sense of being part of, and belonging to, both worlds simultaneously, with a heightened awareness of the experience in the present. It is this lack of differentiation between self and Other, and the merging of identities to which Milner refers (1937/1986; 1958-1959/1987d).

Reflecting on Meaulnes's story as a metaphor for the process of immersive reading, this part of the story exemplifies the point at which the reader merges with that with which she is taken up in reading, such that awareness of her self melts away. Ferrante describes reading as "... dissolving into the pages like a jellyfish" (2012, p. 281), and it is this sense of the individual losing her own shape and the boundaries of her conscious self which is happening here; the two becoming one.

I discovered that this merger of reader and novel is not, however, automatic, and only happens when both intrapsychic and interpersonal conditions are conducive. I move on now to discuss the nature of this facilitating environment. Writing of an individual playing, and likening this to the patient in analysis, Winnicott (1969) propounds that the success of the enterprise depends upon the subject's capacity for play/ability to use the analyst, recognising that this facility is not instinctual or innate (like, e.g., the feeding reflex), but requires an active valency on the part of the individual for such activity. I am finding that a comparable position pertains for the reader of literary fiction, who, in order to be able to use her reading experience, must have the requisite psychic capacity to do so (in addition to the literary competency, which is *sine qua non*).

In Winnicott's thinking, the capacity to use the Other in this way develops from the matrix of a conducive milieu provided by the primary caregiver. He states: "To use an object, the subject must have developed a capacity to use objects ... This capacity cannot be said to be inborn, nor can its development in an individual be taken for granted ... [it] depends on a facilitating environment" (Winnicott, 1969, p. 713). I have discovered that there are clear resonances with the experience of the immersive reader, in that the choice of, and engagement in, the activity of reading are within her omnipotent control. As a solitary undertaking, reading necessitates an exclusion of attention to others, while the reader allows herself to be one with her book. She picks it up and puts it down at will. She has ultimate oversight of the experience, which might be considered legitimately solipsistic.

The experience of Meaulnes (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971), as the reader, corroborates the concept of the facilitating environment, both in showing how, when conditions are conducive, he is enabled to engage with his adventure, and how, under different circumstances, the magic is lost and unable to be consciously replicated. When, on returning home from his escapade, he seeks consciously to retrace his steps, with the agenda of returning and meeting up with Yvonne and recapturing some of the magic of the experience, he finds himself thwarted. All the maps and charts that he accumulates are but a pale reflection of what he is seeking to find, and his conscious efforts thereafter fail to reproduce that initial experience. As Milner (1950/2010) found when exploring and investing in techniques and training classes to teach her how to paint, her attempts failed, and she found her agenda flawed. She writes that "... [f]earful of missing any aspect through inattention, [she] would often attend so carefully that [she] missed the whole thing" (Field/Milner, 1934/1952, p. 108). She discovered the secret later, when she recognised, counter-intuitively, that the opposite process held true: letting go and trusting the unconscious, rather than consciously trying harder was the key. Meaulnes, likewise, is unable to recreate his experience as a result of conscious

effort, as, I find, is the reader of literary fiction impeded in her endeavour so long as she attempts to create the experience by conscious means.

After Meaulnes leaves school, François, his trusty companion and confidant, seeks to ingratiate himself with the other boys, feeling keenly the loss of his ally. He elects to do this by confiding to them the story of Meaulnes's adventure, which secret he has guarded fiercely as a co-conspirator throughout the duration of his association with his schoolmate. He is surprised at the reception his tale receives:

> Est-ce que je raconte mal cette histoire? Elle ne produit pas l'effet que j'attendais. Mes compagnons, en bons villageois que rien n'étonne, ne sont pas surpris pour si peu. 'C'était une noce, quoi!' dit Boujardon. 'Delouche en a vu une, à Préveranges, qui était plus curieuse'. Le château? On trouverait certainement des gens du pays qui en ont entendu parler. La jeune fille? Meaulnes se mariera avec elle quand il aura fait son année de service (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, pp. 192-193)[54].

Such a response, devoid of mystery and intrigue, suggests the absence of an environment to facilitate deep psychic connection, condensing the story into bare bones fact, eminently explicable and commonplace. Some time later, Jasmin Delouche identifies the actual location: "'Tiens, mais, j'y pense', dit-il, 'c'est là que Meaulnes - tu sais, le grand Meaulnes? - avait dû aller'"[55] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 212). With a concrete topography and identity, the *domaine mystérieux* becomes *Les Sablonnières*. It has come out of the sphere of the uncanny, bewitching and mystifying, lost its enchantment and simply become known as a place with a grid reference on a map and an ordinary name (and a very earthy one at that, *Les Sablonnières* literally meaning "sand quarry").

Meaulnes's initial encounter with the lost domain, therefore, has an appreciably different quality to that of the subject of his later research and

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[54] Am I not telling the story well? It doesn't produce the effect I am anticipating. My schoolmates, all village lads, who are hard to shock, show no sign of surprise. 'It was just a wedding, wasn't it?', says Boujardon, 'Delouche once saw one at Préveranges, which was even more strange'. The manor house? There are bound to be countryfolk who have heard of it. The young woman? Meaulnes will marry her when he's finished his national service.

[55] 'Hang on a minute! I think', he says, 'it was there that Meaulnes - you know, big Meaulnes - must have gone'.

subsequent visits, and I suggest that this illustrates the presence and absence of a facilitating environment, that the *domaine étrange* is not so much mysterious *per se*, but situationally becomes mysterious as Meaulnes/the reader merges with it in a qualitatively particular way. I go on now to discuss what I have found to be the determinants of the equivalent facilitating environment which enable the psychic capacity of the immersive reader to let go and use her reading, and the absence of which preclude it.

The facilitating environment

For the sake of clarity, although these concepts are in many ways overlapping, I am making a distinction between what I am terming "interpersonal" and "intrapsychic" considerations, in each of which category, a further two divisions may be identified. Under the former classification for a facilitating environment, of those elements considered "interpersonal", the first condition I see (1a) is that there should be no external demands or impingements placed upon the reader by the physical environment or other people in it, or at least that the reader should be able to screen out any such distractions. This is about the relationship of the Other vis-à-vis the self, whereas the second interpersonal consideration concerns the self vis-à-vis the Other, and (1b) is that the reader needs to be able to divest herself of any investment in creating a certain impression and be comfortably unaware of the Other. In terms of the intrapsychic environment necessary to facilitate a deep letting go in the reader, I conclude that (2a) she needs to be in possession of a quiet mind (i.e. without emotional preoccupations of any kind), and secondly (2b) adopting a sufficiently undefended psychic position, such that she is open to being taken where the reading experience leads her, where insights from her unconscious can facilitate the process. Milner describes this process using the metaphor of the reader being willing to come down from her omnipotent ivory tower to dissolve the boundaries between self and Other. She claims: "... I seemed to be discovering that I could ... go down ... and make myself part of what was happening, and only so could I experience certain things which could not be seen from the detached height of the

tower" (Field/Milner, 1934/1952, p. 71). I now discuss each of these four points, drawing on illustrations from literature.

1a): The interpersonal facilitating environment: Absence of external impingements

My finding is that it is possible to enter a deep reading space whilst on a crowded train or surrounded by the hustle and bustle of the activity of others, so long as such external noise or commotion does not directly impact or distract the reader, and she is able to cultivate the psychic space she needs to immerse in her novel. The co-operation of others present in the reader's situation is required, so that the honouring of the sacred reading space is preserved. Although one might read in the presence of another, that presence needs to be undemanding and altruistic enough to contain its own needs for conversation for a time, in favour of affording the reader a solipsistic interlude where she can legitimately devote herself to her book, without the requirement of human interaction. My thesis is that, in the first instance, in order for deep immersive reading to take place and the reader to achieve the requisite level of consciousness where self can merge with the reading material, she must necessarily detach from the impingements of her normal relationships with others, and they must allow her to do so.

I have already shown how, once having made his bid for freedom, Meaulnes (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971) is enabled to continue his adventure into the unknown, and discover the mysterious domain, unencumbered by demands from anyone. Although, on discovering that he has been duped in handing over the horse and cart to Meaulnes, the owner seeks to stop him riding off, his school friends and schoolmaster alike allow him to go, without giving chase. It is not that they are unaware of his absence but are uninvested in imposing constraint on him. François, indeed, watches proceedings with interest from his classroom window, fully cognizant of what is happening: "Je reconnais alors, dans cette forme noire qui tient les guides, un coude nonchalamment appuyé sur le côté de la voiture, à la façon

paysanne, mon compagnon Augustin Meaulnes"[56] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 34). M. Seurel, the class teacher, for his part, plays down the event, simply making alternative arrangements for the collection of his parents-in-law, and leaving Meaulnes to his adventure. This response may be designed to minimise the element of scandal which develops among the schoolboys, rather than to facilitate Augustin, but the impact on him is the same. No demand is made of him to return to school. The peasants, too, whom he meets along the way similarly exert no restraining influence over him, such that he is free to explore and penetrate the virgin territory of the fete at liberty.

I turn now to a passage in Virginia Woolf's (1927/2002) *To the lighthouse,* further to illustrate the accommodation of a third party in facilitating the immersive reading experience. The novel's central protagonists, Mr and Mrs Ramsay, have had an uncomfortable supper, where she resented him for being taciturn and not engaging in conversation with their guests, and they now retire to the sitting room to read. Woolf describes what follows:

> [Mrs Ramsay] looked at her husband (taking up her stocking and beginning to knit), and saw that he did not want to be interrupted - that was clear ... She read and turned the page, swinging herself, zigzagging this way and that, from one line to another as from one branch to another, from one red and white flower to another, until a little sound roused her - her husband slapping his thighs. Their eyes met for a second, but they did not want to speak to each other. ... Don't interrupt me, he seemed to be saying, don't say anything; just sit there. And he went on reading. His lips twitched. It filled him. It fortified him. He clean forgot all the little rubs and digs of the evening, and how it bored him unutterably to sit still while people ate and drank interminably, and his being so irritable with his wife and so touchy and minding when they passed his books over as if they didn't exist at all. ... [H]e felt roused and triumphant and could not choke back his tears. Raising the book a little to hide his face he let them fall and shook his head from side to side and forgot himself completely (Woolf, 1927/2002, p. 86).

What is particularly interesting about this episode, is Mrs Ramsay's benevolence towards her husband ***in connection with his reading***, in contrast to her attitude a few moments earlier, to his silence over their meal. Although she wants something

[56] I recognised the black form which held the horse's reins, one elbow nonchalantly leaning on the side of the cart, as my companion, Augustin Meaulnes.

from him, she sublimates her own desires in favour of facilitating his reading experience and offering him the requisite silence, without demand. The moment when their eyes meet reflects a recognition of the intimacy of reading, and Mrs Ramsay's choice to honour her husband's obvious wish to be excused from relationship and be allowed to stay in his own world of fiction. Whilst this says more about Mrs Ramsay, as the observer, and her willingness to accept being excluded from Mr Ramsay's activity at this point, it beautifully illustrates the unspoken contract between a reader and a third party present, and how reading involves the facilitation of the Other at these moments. It could be said that the third party also has to let go, though in this case, of the possibilities for interacting. Of course, a third party may be more importunate and continue to seek to demand conversation or action from the reader, in which case the reader's capacity to ignore is the decisive factor.

1b): The interpersonal facilitating environment: Absence of reader's alternative agenda in the reading process, a dyadic space

My second point is that the environment that facilitates the reader in the process of letting go and immersing at a deep level in her novel involves not only any third party present in the room temporarily giving up his/her designs upon the reader or desires for interaction with her, but also necessitates the reader herself refraining from using the fact of her reading to communicate a message to the third party. In other words, the desire and intent to engage with her reading needs to be just that, an exclusive, dyadic relationship for its own sake, with no triadic ulterior message or alternative agenda.

Considering the case of Meaulnes (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971) in this connection, it can be noted that he may initially be setting off on his adventure partly with the ulterior motive of looking good in the eyes of his colleagues. He has a reputation to promote. Seen as something of a daredevil, the narrative would suggest that the idea of his escapade might initially be fuelled by a desire to show his classmates that he is an adventurer and does not fear incurring the wrath of the

schoolmaster. Perhaps he also wants to inspire envy. However, once he has actually set off in the carriage and left behind the environs of the schoolhouse, pretensions related to his reputation are quickly forgotten and he banishes thoughts of what others might think and focuses on his journey. Indeed, upon his eventual return to school, he has the disorientated air of a jet-lagged, long-distance traveller, so hard does he find it to settle and engage with his school life again, and so uninterested is he in what others make of him and his absence. This shows that thoughts for his reputation among his colleagues are not on his radar once he is fully engaged with his adventure.

Multifarious examples from literature may be cited to illustrate occasions when the reader has an agenda other than engaging with the novel for its own sake, and reading is seen as a cover for respectability: for instance, when Nabokov's (1955/2006) anti-hero Humbert Humbert uses his book as a "fig leaf" (p. 20) behind which to indulge in paedophilic fantasies; or when Senator Bird in *Uncle Tom's cabin* (Stowe, 1852/2002) draws upon a novel in order to hide his emotion, when moved to tears; or as Bartle Massey (Eliot, 1959/1997) feigns reading in order solicitously to observe his friend, Adam Bede, without putting him under obvious scrutiny to preserve his dignity; or, indeed, when Miss Bartlett, in *A room with a view* (Forster, 1908/2012) pretends to read in order to hide her social anxiety (p. 173). Such reading on each occasion does not foster an environment which facilitates deep, immersive connection with the novel, but is simply a superficial veneer designed to create an impression on others. Thus, intention is key in the success of the letting go and taking the reading to the next level.

2a): The intrapsychic facilitating environment: A quiet mind

I now move on to consider other elements of the facilitating environment for deep immersive reading and turn attention to those intrapsychic conditions which need to pertain. The former of these I am referring to as the necessity for the reader to possess a quiet mind, that is to say, to be in a state devoid of emotional preoccupation, the existence of which would preclude psychic homeostasis at the

point of reading. As has already been noted, the reading of literary fiction is an activity which has as its purpose diversion and enjoyment. It is a pastime undertaken to punctuate the vicissitudes of a busy life and provide relief from daily occupations. This implies a valid element of escape from reality and responsibility being sought in the pages of a novel. In order to enter into the world of fiction and the stories of the lives of those depicted in the book, the reader needs to be able to bracket those personal concerns which previously commanded her attention, to the extent that they do not impinge on the activity. To use reading as a distraction when, for example, in the doctor's waiting room, is reasonable. The depth to which the reader is able to engage with the narrative and lay aside any anxiety about her health or forthcoming medical procedure will, I suggest, be to some extent determined by her capacity to let go of her emotional preoccupation.

In my portal novel, *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971), once embarked on his journey, Augustin exhibits the signs of a quiet mind, intent only upon his adventure. On encountering the farmer and his wife who offer him hospitality when he loses his way, his primary feeling is curiosity rather than fear in his unfamiliar surroundings. "Il se vit à tel point égaré qu'il en fut presque amusé"[57] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 69). His first thought is not his own safety, nor, indeed, how to get home, but he allows himself to enjoy the experience and the company, "... [il] faisait déjà le projet de revenir plus tard avec des camerades revoir ces braves gens"[58] (p. 70), laying aside any erstwhile anxiety, in favour of engaging fully with the present moment. Such, I find, is the capacity required of the immersive reader: to subdue any preoccupations and abandon herself to the reading experience before her.

At this point I turn to another brief literary example, to illustrate the sabotage of the reading experience by an unquiet mind. The protagonist in this

[57] He realised that he was so far off course, that it was almost amusing.
[58] He was already making mental plans to return at a later date with his school friends to visit these lovely people

instance is Alexis Alexandrovich Karenin, husband of the eponymous *Anna Karenina* (Tolstoy, 1877/1999). Having given it much thought, he has responded in the negative to the letter sent to him by his wife, requesting a divorce, after which Tolstoy writes: "He sat down hurriedly and opened his book. He tried to read but could not awaken in himself [any] lively interest ... His eyes were on the book, but he was thinking about something else" (Tolstoy, 1877/1999, p. 281). A little later in the story, after a further request from Anna to be relieved of her wedding vows, he engages in deep soul-searching, which preoccupation precludes his being able to engage with the book he seeks to read. The reader reads:

> The memory of his wife who was so guilty toward him, and toward whom he was so saintly, as the Countess Lydia Ivanovna had justly told him, should not have upset him; but he was not at ease: he could not understand the book he was reading, could not drive away tormenting memories of his relations with her, and of the mistakes which, as it now appeared to him, he had committed in regard to her" (Tolstoy, 1877/1999, pp. 515-516).

Although he takes up his book in an attempt at diversion, the weight of emotion and preoccupying thoughts of his marriage to Anna crowd in upon him. His mind is unquiet, to the point that he cannot subdue it, and he is unable to find the relief he seeks in the pages of a book.

2b): The intrapsychic facilitating environment: Relinquishment of ego defences

The final element and, arguably, most crucial in the facilitating environment for successful immersive reading, is the reader's being prepared actively to relinquish ego defences in the process. Because we are all deeply unconsciously attached to our own individual constellation of carefully crafted psychic defence mechanisms (Freud, 1915-1917/1973), laying them aside is not simply a matter of conscious choice, even when they do come into awareness. I conclude that the purpose of ego defences, however, (explicitly to protect the self and maintain psychic *status quo*) is antithetical to the state of consciousness needed for a successful immersive reading experience, as the reader needs to relinquish attachment to control in her life, in order to allow herself to merge with, and be taken over by, that which she is reading.

Although in the story of Meaulnes (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971), there is an initial arrogance and sense of omnipotence (which I liken metaphorically to the presence of ego defences) in his decision to truant from school, once he is on the road and, importantly, after he becomes lost, he seems very willing to relinquish control and let himself be guided by what he finds, adapting to that, rather than trying to control/shape his environment. The divesting of his school uniform and donning of the clothes provided, the joining in with the activities laid on and following of instructions given, provide a clear metaphor for relinquishing control, and allowing self to be abandoned to the Other.

My literary example of point (2b) comes from Tolstoy's (1877/1999) novel, *Anna Karenina*. As I explore this vignette in greater depth in chapter five, when I focus more specifically on the issue of psychic regression, I cite only brief details at this point to illustrate how the operation of ego defences obviates the requisite letting go for a successful reading experience. The relevant scene from the novel occurs at the point where the eponymous heroine is journeying from Moscow where, the previous night she has fallen in love with Count Vronsky, back to her husband and son in Petersburg. Her mind is in turmoil, as she contemplates the prospect of an extra-marital affair.

Her preoccupation with herself means that everything she reads she relates to herself, and the train of her reverie soon connects her to a sense of shame. It is here that Anna' inability to relinquish her ego defences (2b) precludes her having a satisfying reading experience. Making contact with her sense of shame, however, rather than leading her to a greater self-awareness and potential personal growth, triggers a defensive response. Tolstoy (1877/1999) describes her reaction to this revelation as "indignant surprise" (p. 99); she draws on her capacity to rationalise away the uncomfortable feeling, talking to herself "with decision" (p. 99), which implies a conscious attempt to counter what is happening for her unconsciously. When her attempts mentally to neutralise her relationship with Vronsky fail, asking herself: "What does it signify? ... What of it? ..." (p. 99), Anna draws herself back to

seek refuge in her book, as a form of denial to avoid engaging with the uncomfortable truth. Here she is mobilising ego defences to seek to protect herself from the grim reality of her situation, instead of relinquishing omnipotent control, and allowing her reading to bring her the possibility of personal insight, or, at least, a meaningful distraction.

The overall impression from this little vignette is that this is a very unsatisfactory reading experience, and chiefly on account of the reader's (Anna's) intrapsychic state. Her well-mobilised ego defences mitigate against anything meaningful or insightful emerging, she being unwilling to abandon herself to this. This furnishes a powerful example of the type of letting go about which Milner writes (1934/1952, 1937/1986, 1950/2010, 1956/1987a, 1958-1959/1987d, 1972/1987c), the capacity to detach from investment in the self and transcend the boundaries between self and Other, and which, I am arguing, is *sine qua non* for a successful and meaningful experience of the immersive reading of literary fiction.

My own personal examples of deep letting go whilst reading (cited at the start of the chapter) also illustrate these four conditions. On each occasion I did experience a sympathetic facilitating environment: (1a) I was reading alone in an empty house, the only intermittent distractions coming from external noises or the companionship-seeking of the cat. Thus, I was quickly able to settle after any temporary diversions of this kind. Being solitary in the house, I, therefore (1b) had no-one to impress or no alternative agenda apart from the need to provide reflections on my reading experience in my research reading journal. Awareness of the latter was sporadic and fleeting. In terms of the intrapsychic elements of the facilitating environment, I believe it is true to say that on those occasions recorded, (2a) my mind was entirely focused on my reading. This may not have been the case consistently, and there is evidence in other parts of my reading journals that on other occasions I was too preoccupied to be able to engage in such an abandoned way. What might I have missed, had I been able to engage similarly at those points? At those times under consideration, however, the strong emotions that

emerged did so at the point of reading and as a result of letting go in my reading. At the point of the three incidents recorded, I believe (as far as awareness permits) that I was also (2b) sufficiently psychically undefended and, *ergo*, receptive to merging with my narrative at a deep level. I was willing, for example, to relinquish a firmly held rationalisation of being a victim in the break-up of my marriage, and so enabled to emerge with a much wider perspective on my life than that to which I was formerly espoused, and found great healing in this.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have introduced ideas about the transformational potential of immersive literary reading (which is considered further in chapter seven), and presented my thesis that, in order for the reader to engage at a deep level in the process, she must have the capacity to let go of her own ego concerns and boundaries at a very deep level, and that a psychic merger with that which she is reading is necessary. I build on and apply to immersive literary reading the principles that Milner (1934/1952, 1937/1986, 1950/2010, 1956/1987a, 1958-1959/1987d, 1972/1987c) identified in her observations of her own experiences in her attempts to learn to paint that, contrary to expectation, rather than striving hard to gain mastery over techniques, what is required is a deep letting go, where the unconscious may lead the individual.

I introduced vignettes from my own experiences of reading at the start of the chapter, to illustrate the transformational potential of a willing abandonment to reading. I conclude that, on the occasions where I have been able to do this and relinquish the psychic defences that attached me to an entrenched autobiographical viewpoint, deep healing and personal growth have resulted.

In this chapter I have also identified (1) interpersonal and (2) intrapsychic conditions that facilitate the capacity to let go: (1a) that there should be no external demands or impingements placed upon the reader by the physical environment or other people in it; (1b) that the reader needs to be able to divest herself of any

personal agenda in her reading; (2a) that she needs to be in possession of a quiet mind (i.e. without emotional preoccupations); and (2b) that the reader needs a willingness to relinquish psychic defences and be open to unconscious leading. I have discussed each of these elements in relation to my portal novel, *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971), showing how Augustin gave himself over to his adventure, quickly dropping his agenda to impress or inspire envy in his colleagues, embracing his lostness on finding he had strayed from his intended path, participating heart and soul in the drama unfolding before him without recrimination or concern about what he had left behind him, and allowing himself to be guided by the prevailing mood and orchestrators of the *fête étrange*.

I have shown that Meaulnes was not expecting to lose himself, either literally or metaphorically. At various points along the way, he could have turned back and chosen deliberately to take control of the situation, but he elected to go deeper into the mists of the unknown, by degrees as he did so, relinquishing his connection to his old self and embracing an altered set of circumstances. So, I maintain, the reader also has the choice to remain engaged with her novel at a surface level, maintaining cognizance of the characters and plot, and enjoying the pictures painted in her imagination of the settings and environment, or to immerse herself at a deeper level where she is no longer just the objective observer of an unfolding tale, but allows herself to breach consciousness of her Self and her position and become one with whole experience of the story. Initial transferences, prejudices and affiliations with specific characters are superseded by a more global sense of merger with the whole, and from within the narrative deriving new awarenesses, which are not possible so long as the reader holds tenaciously to her own perspective and autobiographical biases.

Chapter five: Anna Karenina

The literary focus of this chapter is an extended vignette from *Anna Karenina* (Tolstoy, 1873-1877/1999), where Tolstoy describes an experience of reading in the life of his eponymous heroine, through which I examine various facets of the reading relationship, and introduce further dimensions of my thesis. In a quasi-vertiginous meta-meta-narrative, I am writing about the experience of the reader of a novel reading about a character in a novel reading another novel, like a series of Russian dolls.

Various facets of my thesis are illustrated in the chosen vignette and in this chapter I home in on these nuanced aspects in the chain of signifiers which corporately seek to adumbrate the phenomenon of immersive literary reading. First I discuss the necessity of the reader adopting what I am referring to as a ***regressed*** psychic state, or variously a ***primitive***, ***primal***, or ***early*** mentality, the terminology collectively aiming to signify a return to that carefree mental position typical of primordial life, where the individual is not required to take responsibility and is free to experience and connect with her unconscious mind**.** My thesis is that, for the literary reading experience to be successful, the reader needs to embrace a primitive mental attitude and be in dyadic relationship with her text (unencumbered by third party intrusions), mirroring that which pertains in early life between mother and infant. This process needs to be considered in the light of other related and overlapping elements, and particularly ***letting go***, which is discussed in chapter four, and separating the two is, in many ways, an artificial distinction, as they are complementary processes, which together contribute to the reader's experience of reading. Unless the reader is able to let go and divest herself of ego concerns and preoccupations, she will be unable to attain or sustain the regressed mental attitude under consideration, which I conclude is necessary for a successful reading experience. In order to explore the phenomenon in depth, my focus is explicitly over the issue of regression, though letting go is also implicit in the argument. As a starting point for this discussion, I consider Klein's (1957) concept of the paranoid schizoid position, and argue that, rather than being a defensive attitude, it is

appropriate in the context of immersive reading and, therefore, what I am terming ***sophisticated***. I explore the juxtaposition of primitive and advanced psychic functions along with other facets of regressed mentality (the facilitating environment of physical stillness and the absence of preoccupation), and how they might apply to the reading of fiction.

A second key phenomenon that is highlighted in the excerpt from *Anna Karenina* (Tolstoy, 1873-1877/1999), is the question of a reader's envy towards the characters in her novel, and the adverse impact this has on the reading experience. My conclusion is that when an individual experiences envy, her Self is centre stage, and this position is antithetical to the mental state which she needs to adopt in order to merge successfully with her text. I refer to this throughout my writing variously as ***merger***, an ***undifferentiated state***, ***loss of boundaries*** between self and other, and the chain circles back also to incorporate the concept of ***letting go*** (Milner, 1950/2010), and here I am explicitly thinking of letting go of the ego, but I discuss in chapter nine the whole issue of exactly what is let go in the process of reading.

Thirdly comes into play the question of the reader's reverie and the liminal space which she occupies at the point of reading. Reverie, which I am defining as a meditative, or absent-minded state (Milner, 1969), I also link to the capacity to let go, and, indeed, to regression as, at the point of reverie, I find, the reader is detached from super-ego censorship of her mental activity, and, in fact, is thinking mainly in images rather than concepts or conscious thoughts, which, developmentally pre-date cognitive thinking (Freud, 1900; Hans, 1977), which links back to the concept of maintaining a regressed mental position. The state of consciousness thus attained I refer to as ***liminal***, indicating that it exists between two worlds (that of real life and that of fiction) and that the reader remains on the threshold of each, but within neither.

Key theorists on whose ideas I draw in these discussions are primarily from the psychoanalytic object relations tradition: Melanie Klein in relation to the concept

of the paranoid schizoid position and its allied defence mechanism of splitting (Khan, 1975), and Winnicott (1969) with particular reference to his writing about the developmental transition from ***object relations*** to ***object usage***, as I find that immersive literary reading entails a reversal of these processes. Mention is also made of Milner and her work on reverie, liminality, the frame, and boundaries (1950/2010, 1952, 1957/1987b). Space will also be given to the writings of the American literary critic, Norman Holland (1975, 2009b), bringing a neuro-psychoanalytic perspective to introduce the links between physical inertia and the regressed state of mental engagement in literary fiction. I first present the vignette in question.

Setting the scene

The scene in which I pick up the story, follows Tolstoy's (1873-1877/1999) eponymous heroine, Anna Karenina, returning home to her husband and son in Petersburg, fresh from her encounter the previous evening with Count Vronsky, with whom she has experienced a mutual, electrifying attraction. As her train is described pulling out of the snow-covered station in Moscow, she is found organising herself in her carriage, and, "... not foreseeing anything interesting from the conversation [with her fellow traveller]", preparing "with pleasure and great deliberation" (Tolstoy, 1873-1877/1999, p. 98) to settle herself to read her book on her journey. I quote the extract (mostly) unabridged:

> At first she could not read. For a while the bustle of people moving about disturbed her, and when the train had finally started it was impossible not to listen to the noises, then there was the snow, beating against the window on her left, to which it stuck, and the sight of the guard, who passed through the carriage closely wrapped up and covered with snow on one side; also the conversation about the awful snow-storm which was raging outside distracted her attention. And so it went on and on: the same jolting and knocking and the same beating of the snow on the windowpane, the same rapid changes from steaming heat to cold, and back again to heat, the gleam of the same faces through the semi-darkness and the same voices - but at last Anna began to read and to follow what she read ... but it was unpleasant to read, that is to say, to follow the reflection of other people's lives. She was too eager to live herself. When she read how the heroine of the novel nursed a sick man, she wanted to move about the sick-room with noiseless footsteps; when she read of a member of Parliament making a speech, she wished to make that speech; when she read how Lady Mary rode to hounds, teased her sister-in-law, and

astonished everybody by her boldness - she wanted to do it herself. But there was nothing to be done, so she forced herself to read ...

The hero of the novel had nearly attained to his English happiness of a baronetcy and an estate, and Anna wanted to go to the estate with him, when suddenly she felt that he must have been ashamed, and that she was ashamed of the same thing - but what was he ashamed of? 'What am I ashamed of?' she asked herself with indignant surprise. She put down her book, leaned back and grasped the paper-knife in both hands. There was nothing to be ashamed of. She called up all her Moscow memories. They were all good and pleasant. She recalled the ball and Vronsky and his humble, enamoured gaze, and their relations with one another; there was nothing to be ashamed of. And yet at that very point of her recollections when she remembered Vronsky, the feeling of shame grew stronger and some inner voice seemed to say to her, 'warm, very warm, burning!' Well, what of it?' she finally said to herself with decision, changing her position on the seat. 'What does it signify? Am I afraid to look straight at it? What of it? Just as if there existed or could exist, between me and this officer-lad any relations differing from those with other acquaintances'. She smiled disdainfully and again took up her book; but now she absolutely could not understand what she was reading. …

Momentary doubts kept occurring in her mind as to whether the train was moving forwards or backwards or standing still. Was it Annushka who was sitting beside her, or a stranger? 'And am I here, myself? Am I myself or another?' She was afraid of giving way to these delirious thoughts. Something seemed to draw her to them, but she had the power to give way to them or to resist. To get over it she rose, threw off her wrap and took off the cape of her coat. She came to her senses for a moment and knew that the lean peasant in the long nankin coat with a button missing who had come into the compartment was the carriage stoker and was looking at the thermometer, and that the wind and snow rushed in when he opened the door; but afterwards everything again became confused ....

Anna felt as though she had fallen through the floor.... The voice of a man wrapped up and covered with snow shouted something just above her ear. She rose and came to herself .... She asked Annushka to give her the cape she had removed and a shawl, and putting them on she moved to the door" (Tolstoy, 1873-1877/1999, pp. 98-100).

Stillness

The first point that I notice is that successful immersive reading takes place in the crucible of an external stance of physical inertia, and this bodily stillness helps to facilitate mental regression. Though (both) the (conscious and unconscious) mind is alert and active in the occupation, the body remains still in order to facilitate access to the appropriate psychic space. In Tolstoy's (1873-1877/1999) novel, there are various outside distractions that mitigate against Anna physically settling down quietly in her carriage: the "bustle of people moving about" (p. 98), the noises, the

snowstorm, the "jolting and knocking" (p. 98), notwithstanding the fact that she has availed herself of a little pillow, and wrapped up her feet against the cold, in an effort to facilitate her comfort (p. 98). Physically she is unsettled, there is activity going on around her, and it transpires that the nature of her distraction when she does manage to read her novel, is to wish to participate in the activity of the plot. She wants to be ***doing***, personally to be actively undertaking the experiences of the protagonists of the tale, identifying with them: to nurse the sick; to make a speech; to ride in the hunt; to visit the estate. It is not enough for her to be still, to be a bystander, to be entertained or moved by the narrative, or experience vicariously the emotions portrayed from the safety of the exteriority of readership; she wants to be fully involved and physically engaged with the activities recounted. So, although she is reading, she is resistant to taking up the role of the reader, wanting, instead, actually to be part of the plot. Her stance is, therefore, orientated towards activity, which mitigates against a successful reading experience.

Further, it becomes apparent that, at the point of connecting with her sense of shame, triggered by a moment of reverie when she does fleetingly manage to settle to read, Anna uses physical action to break the train of thought: "She put down her book, leaned back and grasped the paper-knife in both hands" (p. 99) and later interrupts herself by "changing her position on the seat" (p. 99). When lost in the confusion of "delirious thoughts" (p. 99) unable to determine the real from the fictitious, Anna physically shifts her position: "… she rose, threw off her wrap and took off the cape of her coat" (p. 99), and a little later: "[s]he rose and came to herself .... asked Annushka to give her the cape she had removed and a shawl, and putting them on she moved to the door" (p. 100). It is actual, deliberate, bodily movement, ***the counterpoint to physical inertia***, that breaks the spell of any reverie or mental absorption in the novel, and, indeed, precludes her continued experience of unwelcome emotions, such as the shame that she connects with but tries to repudiate. Consciously re-establishing a corporeal relationship with *terra firma* has the effect of moving her away from the shadowy realms of make-believe and the

unwelcome murky depths of her own psyche. Movement here operates as an ego defence against what confronts her in her reading.

The question of the relationship of physical inertia to the capacity to be engrossed in literature is an interesting one, and goes some way to explaining why what Freud refers to as "the many excitations that are in themselves painful … can give pleasure to the writer's audience" (1908/2003, p. 26). I ponder this issue in greater depth in chapter six, but the point I make here is that witnessing an act of violence or an accident in real life produces a very different response in the individual from reading about it in the context of a piece of literary fiction. Norman Holland, American pioneer of reader response theory, writes (1975) about the fact that the crucial difference in the latter milieu is that there is no compunction to act in relation to what is being read. The reader has no responsibility for making any decision about what strategy or course of action should be taken, nor mobilising appropriate resources to redeem the situation. She simply has to engage with the story mentally. The action all takes place internally, whilst her ***external stance is inactive***.

She sits immobile in a chair, or bed, disengages from the chores and encounters of day-to-day living and gives herself over to her book. As the reader enters the reading space, her brain "... sends to the premotor cortex a "do-not-act" signal that shuts down the normal impulse to act in response to emotional situations" (Holland, 2014, personal communication). So, freed up from any obligation to do anything, her energy and concentration may be completely given over to absorption in what she is reading. Such practice, says Holland, "returns us to our very earliest modes of thought. Motor inactivity permits (at least when we are engrossed in "entertainments") a sort of total immersion in fantasy" (Holland, 1975, p. 72). In much the same way, perhaps, one might approach a rollercoaster ride, with the express intention of undergoing a purely sensory experience (albeit of quite a disturbing kind), passively strapped into a chair, aware that there is no requirement to take any action, but simply to feel. Replicate the same sensations of

speed and near misses to a real-life motorway situation, and the adrenalin rush and fear response would propel the driver into remedial action and leave a very different psychic legacy.

The key point that I wish to underline here is Holland's statement linking the do-not-act message to the capacity to immerse in fantasy and to a regression to "our very earliest modes of thought" (Holland, 1975, p. 72). Such a primitive mental space goes hand-in-hand with a lack of responsibility for, and capacity to affect the outcome of, events. Because the babe-in-arms is unable to get herself out of her cot and get up and put the light on, say, or feed herself, her only recourse is to emote and either acquiesce or complain. Similarly, the reader in a state of physical stasis is freed from the compunction to act upon what she is reading, and simply has the task of experiencing, vicariously identifying with the characters in her book, and engaging with her feelings and reverie.

In his later (2009) paper, Holland clarifies also the links between physical inertia and regression and the concomitant suspension of the brain's faculty for reality-testing, noting the latter as "also related to ***planning*** movement and action" (2009, p. 3, italics mine). He clarifies: "To intend to act, to plan a movement, we imagine the outcome" (2009, p. 4). Implicit, therefore, in the inhibition of movement whilst reading is also an interruption of the capacity even to contemplate action, hence that particular brain function remains dormant at the point of immersion in a text and a primitive mental state holds sway. Physicality and immersive literary reading are, I find, therefore, mutually exclusive, because the former precludes acceding to the necessary early mental state in which to engage with fiction.

Tolstoy shows that Anna Karenina is unable to maintain the requisite bodily stillness, such that mentally she fails to register the "do-not-act" message, and so wants to be actively engaged in the performance of the storyline in her book. Her restlessness, however, is not only physically manifest in being unsettled as she sits but is also a psychic phenomenon. Her mind, too, is unquiet.

Preoccupation

Anna's thoughts are in turmoil. On the one hand she is enchanted with her would-be lover and the excitation this inspires, on the other seeking to rid herself of the discombobulating temptation and return to her "good accustomed life ... of old" (p. 98) with the familiarity and stability of her loveless marriage to Alexis Alexandrovich Karenin and her son Serezha, on whom she dotes.

In writing on creativity and reading, Freud (1908/2003, p. 33) notes ".... the real enjoyment of a literary work derives from the relaxation of tensions in our minds". Irrespective of the pleasure in following a plot, and being taken mentally on flights of imagination into a colourful alternative world, however enjoyable these elements may be, Freud concludes that, rather than a focus on the content of what is being read, it is the ***process*** of the engagement with a work of literary fiction and the state of mind in which the reader approaches and engages in the pursuit wherein lies the greatest satisfaction. Whilst I think Freud does not go far enough and believe that there is more to the enjoyment of reading than just mental repose, I see the absence of tension or preoccupation as an important part of the process. It is this state of mind that eludes Anna. Her thoughts cannot be quieted; she is unable to abandon herself fully to her reading, and so relax the tension in her mind. She is in emotional tumult.

Before Anna even embarks upon the train journey, she is "... agitated by the thought of Vronsky..." (Tolstoy, 1873-1877/1999, p. 96). The sensations that flood her body and the questions that dominate her mind preclude her from being able to settle to the pastime she has selected, even though she seeks this as a distraction. Thus, a useful distinction emerges here: it is not that Anna is resistant to reading *per se* (she has, in fact, selected this occupation and anticipated it with pleasure, as noted earlier), but I notice that her antipathy is towards surrendering herself to a certain quality of reading, and thus to engaging in an undefended, regressed way that would have allowed her to loosen her attachment to her immediate situation, and permit her thoughts and feelings to be taken up in the fiction, and the musings

and identifications of her concomitant reverie. In other words, she is mentally defended against letting go to the process, and therefore unable to access the primitive mentality necessary to absorb herself in her novel.

Indeed, when she does for a brief time achieve this level of engagement, reading of the shame felt by the hero in her novel, Anna makes an unconscious identification with him and is then confronted with the shame that she, herself, is also feeling. It might be surmised that, all along, it is this that she is seeking to evade: at an unconscious level recognising that, were she to loosen control of her thoughts to the level of abandonment necessary for engagement with fiction, her primal, undefended psyche would connect with her shame, and she would have to acknowledge it. This she does not want to do.

The nature of this quality of attention that makes it so compelling and at the same time may evoke resistance (as it does with Anna) comes about because, I infer, it is a ***regressive*** state, devoid of the sophisticated unconscious ego defence mechanisms present in normal adult functioning, which both enchants the reader and leaves her vulnerable to connect with deeper elements of her psyche. It is to an exploration of this paradox that I now turn attention.

Sophisticated regression

Being fully absorbed in literary fiction (facilitated by the physical stillness necessary to maintain the immersion), I suggest, transports the reader back into an early mode of functioning that is described developmentally and in terms of object relations theory as an "undifferentiated state" (Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975; Tyson & Tyson, 1990), before the individual is able to distinguish between inner and outer reality, or, indeed, self and (m)other. This mental state permits blissful merger with the text, much as the babe-in-arms perceives herself one with her mother and the environment. Issues of merger and the blurring of boundaries are discussed in chapter four, and, although connected in the chain of signification, I focus here explicitly on the link to it being a regressed psychic state. I conclude that the reader

needs to embrace what I am terming a ***sophisticated paranoid schizoid*** mentality in order to engage meaningfully with a work of literary fiction: ***sophisticated*** in that, in the context of such reading the mentality is appropriate and necessary, ***paranoid schizoid*** because it engages the primary ego defence characterised by Klein's (1946), paranoid schizoid position. The kind of mental splitting that is imperative when engaged with a work of fiction is not defensive in this context, but apposite, and prerequisite to being able to exist contemporaneously in two worlds (the real and the fictitious). The reading of literary fiction, additionally, requires the mobilisation of high- level literacy skills and symbolic capacity, which also add weight to the process being deemed sophisticated. At the same time, the reader may be said to be in dyadic relationship to her text, and engaged in the primitive phenomenon of ***object relating*** (to subjectively created objects) rather than ***object usage*** (with a clear recognition of the separateness and objective otherness of the Other) (Winnicott, 1969). It is on these concepts and the nature of these unconscious processes that I now elaborate.

A paranoid schizoid mentality may be described as the "complicated interaction between internal phantasy and the external world" (Ruszczynski & Johnson, 1999, p. 15). In the classic Kleinian understanding of paranoid schizoid thinking (Gomez, 1997; Ruszczynski & Johnson, 1999; Likierman, 2001), an individual constructs a concrete phantasy (i.e. personal fiction) based upon her inner state to explain her experience in the world, and to seek to rid herself of distressing or unwanted sensations. She may attribute her own internal anxiety or malevolence to an external source, seeking to divest herself of them, and preserve her own internal equilibrium. When faced with persecutory anxieties, and/or what Bion terms "nameless dread" (1967/2007b, p. 116), in an attempt to make her world safe again, she may construct a personal fiction of a wicked perpetrator seeking to destroy her, and react to that person in real life as if this belief were true. The evil then is seen to reside outside of herself, and so is less of a menace. This misrepresentation serves the purpose of protecting her from perceived internal

threat and seeks to maintain her personal integrity in the face of frightening, angry and otherwise seemingly incomprehensible sensations and experiences.

The Other to whom the neonate is relating in this instance is a fabrication of her own, as she projects her own internal state onto the actual Other. This paranoid schizoid thinking is concrete. It is pre-symbolic and, *ergo*, associated with a primal mentality. The internal sense of "badness" is eliminated into another, and the other is viewed in this light, without reference to her (the other's) own attributes or intentions. The disjunction between reality and phantasy is not recognised, the latter obfuscating the former, and being perceived as actuality at that time. In Kleinian and Winnicottian (1971) thinking, the task of moving from object relating (where the object is a subjective collection of projections as illustrated above) to object usage (where the other is understood as a separate individual with her own character, needs and attributes, who cannot be destroyed in fantasy, and so available for real relationship) is a developmental milestone.

This is not, however, exclusively the preserve of young babies, as, in Kleinian thinking, throughout the whole of life, an individual will go in and out of paranoid schizoid thinking, reverting to these primitive defences at times of anxiety, stress, or personal development. It may be seen, then as a constant movement back and forth between the paranoid schizoid and depressive positions (Bion, 1963; Klein, 1946), the latter being the term for more mature functioning, where empathic awareness of the Other resides, with the capacity for (depressive) guilt over hurtful actions and the desire for reparation. Bion noted that "every movement forward in development entails a degree of internal disruption and anxiety which temporarily throws the personality into disarray, that is, back into a more chaotic state of mind" (Waddell, 2002, p. 8). The paranoid schizoid position should not be seen, therefore, in purely pejorative terms, but a necessary part of every human being's psychic journey in life. Nevertheless, even if part of a process of personal growth, it denotes temporary regression to an earlier mental state, and this is my key point in considering the experience of the immersive literary reader.

My finding is that a similar disjunction between reality and fantasy is a necessary prerequisite for a satisfactory experience of reading, but that the difference is that the reader deliberately allows herself to be taken into a fictitious world, knowing that it ***is*** fictitious. So the experience might be described as ***sophisticated*** (borrowing the term from Bion's (1961) nomenclature of sophisticated/specialised basic assumption groups) as it is entered into of the reader's own volition, has a higher function, and the process is to some extent under her control (she can stop reading at any point of her choice, or be distracted from the novel and return to reality or the world of her own thoughts at will), but paranoid schizoid as the nature of the relationship she has to the characters (objects) in the novel is subjective, rather than objective - i.e. object related rather than the dynamic connection of the full object usage of mature relationship, which would be impossible with the cast of a novel, who are the reader's conceptions, and therefore incapable of reciprocity. The text describes the *dramatis personae* but the reader overlays these with her own thoughts and visualisations, thus creating the protagonists subjectively after her own image. Their existence remains dependent upon, and lives only in, the psyche of the reader, an invention of her own imagination. My thesis is that what happens in the reader's experience may be construed, therefore, as a reversal of normal developmental processes, her relationship with the characters in the text moving from a state akin to object usage (because they have an acknowledged discrete identity) back to a position of object relations (where they are created in her own imagination).

Every individual reading of every novel is, thus, unique, the characters a hybrid of the depiction of the text and the personal object-related creation of the reader. I borrow a notion from Victor Burgin, the English conceptual artist, who writes about the nature of the moving image, in his commentary on cinematography when he states: "... the film *we* saw is never the film *I* remember" (2004, p. 110). To illustrate my point, I hazard a corruption of this quotation to say that "the novel that Henry James or Leo Tolstoy wrote, is never the book *I* read", in the same way that the mother who comes to soothe the fractious infant is not the

mother she perceives. The individual spectator's/reader's/child's experience is a conglomeration of a given external stimulus and her own imagination. In psychoanalytic terms, then, this type of object relationship must, *ergo*, be equated with an early paranoid schizoid position, where the others (i.e. characters in the novel) are idiosyncratic objects, constructed in the reader's imagination.

Thus far in this chapter I have discussed two key elements of my thesis that relate to regression. In the first place I expound my theory that immersive literary reading entails the reader psychically embracing a sophisticated paranoid schizoid mentality, by which I mean that, by consciously choosing to suspend her capacity to evaluate the veracity of what she reads and surrender herself emotionally to the experience, she is able to enter a primitive psychic space akin to early dyadic relations between mother and infant. In this space she is able to utilise the phenomenon of splitting, to engage with a fictitious narrative at the same time as being present in the world. Because the reading of fiction requires advanced literary skills and symbolic capacity, as well as the fact that engaging a primal, undifferentiated mentality is contextually appropriate, I refer to the phenomenon as being sophisticated as well as paranoid schizoid. Secondly, I argue that the nature of the reader's connection to the characters in her text may be deemed to be an object relationship (i.e. a construction of her own internal imagination) such as pertains in early life, before an individual is able to relate to an Other as being distinctly other (object usage) (Winnicott, 1969). This, I show, is a reversal of normal developmental processes, where a child learns to recognise the Other as being different and separate from the self, an entity which is not under her omnipotent control, but with whom she might relate in a dialogic way. Thus, the nature of the relationship a reader has with the others in her text also illustrates the regressed nature of her psychic state.

As previously noted, the processes I am discussing related to the phenomenon of immersive literary reading are inter-related and overlapping, and each may be described by a chain of signifiers, which, together, paint a picture of

the whole experience. I am, therefore, making an artificial differentiation between interlocking concepts for the purpose of focusing on specific elements in turn. In chapter four I introduce ideas about the reader's ***letting go***, variously signified as ***abandoning***, or ***losing her Self*** in the process, to arrive at a state of ***merger*** with her text, also referred to as achieving an ***undifferentiated***, ***boundary-less***, or ***oceanic*** state, where the individual ego is subsumed in the reading process and the reader becomes one with the text. In this chapter I am linking these concepts also with the recognition that the mental state arrived at by letting go and merging, is reminiscent of the primitive experience of an infant, before she has developed a sense of self or strong ego defences, and I am finding that to be successful in the literary endeavour, the reader needs to be able to divest herself of psychic defences in order to enter a receptive space, receptive not just to engaging mentally with the text, but also to whatever personal insights might emerge from her reverie whilst reading.

In the next section I explore the impact of a reader's refusal to let go in this way in her reading and retain an egoic position, and specifically consider the phenomenon of envy, and explicitly envy of the characters in her novel, as described in Tolstoy's (1873-1877/1999) observations on reading in the extract of *Anna Karenina* cited above. I am not considering the text from a position of literary criticism but wish to highlight this small vignette as a phenomenological commentary on the process of reading. Different facets of letting go and the refusal to let go are considered in more detail in chapters four and seven, respectively. Discussion here focuses specifically on envy and its effect on the reading experience.

Envy

In the extract cited above (Tolstoy, 1873-1877/1999, pp. 98-100), Anna Karenina is described as feeling envious of the people in her novel. She is taken back to this primal emotion, as she struggles to abandon herself to her reading and suspend her own egoic desires. She is not satisfied with a vicarious enjoyment of engaging with

the stories of the protagonists' lives; rather, she wants to ***be*** them, to participate in the action herself.

Her dissatisfaction with reading and repudiation of the pastime, awash as she is with emotions of her own, fresh from her encounter with Vronsky, might understandably be considered a reflection of her own desire to get on with ***her own*** life. Tolstoy observes: "... it was unpleasant to read, that is to say, to follow the reflection of other people's lives. She was too eager to live herself" (1873-1877/1999, p. 98). This might not seem unreasonable for someone in a state of emotional excitation, preoccupied as she is in the first flush of falling in love. Intrusive thoughts of the beloved might be expected to impinge on any attempted mental activity at such a time. In fact, finding the concentration requisite to read might be problematic. However, when the statement is further clarified, this is not the scenario that emerges. It is, rather, that she wishes to be involved as a player in ***the characters***' lives, ***not*** eager to live her own:

> When she read how the heroine of the novel nursed a sick man, she wanted to move about the sick-room with noiseless footsteps; when she read of a member of Parliament making a speech, she wished to make that speech; when she read how Lady Mary rode to hounds, teased her sister-in-law, and astonished everybody by her boldness - she wanted to do it herself (Tolstoy, 1873-1877/1999, p. 98).

This, I find, curious, and worthy of further deliberation. It is notable, in the light of the earlier discussion about physical stillness and the capacity to read, that Anna's envious thoughts take the shape of activity: to "move about the sick room" (p. 98), to "make [a] speech" (p. 98), and to ride in the hunt. Not only does she literally use bodily movement to stop herself settling down, she also fantasises about engaging in activities, to remove herself mentally, I suggest, from connecting with what might have been emerging in her psyche (her sense of shame).

For Anna Karenina, there is no evidence that she feels a particular affiliation with, or desire to live the storyline of any one particular person in the narrative, her desire for action seeming quite indiscriminate and applicable to a plethora of

characters. Further, the activities she covets are very mundane (nursing, orating, horse-riding), particularly when compared to the grand balls and social occasions she is used to and has just experienced in Moscow. I conclude that her envy might have been aroused by her wish to escape ***from*** her current situation, rather than ***to*** any specific preferred scenario (though, ironically, she refuses herself the temporary respite that reading might have allowed her in this regard). She faces the prospect of some untenable decisions: to pursue her infatuation with Vronsky at the possible expense of being able to be with her son, and losing her status and reputation in society, or return to the prospect of a respectable but loveless marriage and forever sacrifice the expectation of a passionate relationship with the man with whom she has fallen in love, or seek to conduct her love affair by secret liaison whilst continuing the appearance of married life. In any of these three options, compromises would have to be made, and a decision in favour of any one option would deleteriously affect other aspects of her life. Her future is uncertain and the security and tranquillity which have thus far accompanied her in her married life are possibly collapsing around her. At a time when it might be most beneficial for her, Anna finds no respite in immersive reading, unable to lose herself in the lives depicted in her novel, but instead feels envy towards them.

As noted earlier, one of the joys of reading literary fiction is the fact that the reader has no responsibility to take action in relation to the narrative she reads. The plot is already set, the outcome (although not known whilst in the process of reading) has been decided and will come to pass as the author has decreed. The reader, whilst she may create her own versions of the personalities of the characters in transit, has no control over the actual events and *dénouement* of the story. She is carefree in that regard, has only to experience and emote, even though it may be a disturbing or harrowing read at times. The players in the book, *ergo*, are the objects of fatalism, even though they are shaped in their identities and brought to life by the co-creation of the reader. Anna Karenina is feeling the burden of the weight of responsibility for not only her own life but also that of Serezha, her son, Vronsky, her would-be lover, and Karenin, her hapless husband, and having to make some

difficult decisions which will impact them all. Their fates hang largely in her hands. I infer that she envies the position of the characters in her novel because they are able to go about their carefully choreographed lives, unencumbered by the weight of responsibility for their own destinies. Perhaps she wishes her own life were a fiction, ordained by the hand of an author and for which she has no accountability, that the story she is about to enact were not real life, and that she could wake up, as if from a dream, in the same way as she could distract her attention away from her book at will.

This envy of the carefree existence of the characters of the novel might, I suggest, be linked to the coveted state of regression in which the reader engages when abandoned to her fiction, like that experienced by the untroubled, developing child, whose early life is orchestrated by her parent figures, who hold ultimate responsibility. Anna's preoccupations and propensity for distraction preclude her from achieving this equanimity for any length of time, so she, as a reader, is not able to get on with her task, while they, as *dramatis personae*, are going about their business as they are destined to do. Perhaps she also envies their freedom of movement, their ability to progress from scene to scene, whilst eschewing her own sense of incarceration in the train, which might, under different circumstances, have been a welcome licence to enjoy the stillness requisite to engage in a novel. For Anna, stasis is enforced (and it presages her future position), and it is this, at this particular time, that she resents (because she does not wish to be still and face what is being presented to her through her reading), and which generates envious feelings. Klein avers:

> The well-known fact that parents relive in their children and grand-children their own lives … Those who feel that they have had a share in the experience and pleasures of life are much more able to believe in the continuity of life... All this is felt by the envious person as something he can never attain because he can never be satisfied, and therefore his envy is reinforced (Klein, as cited in Khan, 1975, pp. 203-204).

The reader of literary fiction might be considered, in much the same way as parents or grandparents relive their lives through their progeny, to share in the experiences of the people in her book, enjoying vicarious satisfaction from the vicissitudes of their lives, and reappraising elements of her own in the light of what she is reading. The envious person, according to Klein, however, might experience an escalation of her envy when witnessing the fortunes of others. It is likely, therefore, that the envy Anna feels pre-dates the reading of her novel, and is, in fact, a projection onto the characters of that which she already feels.

Certainly, the character Anna Karenina is portrayed throughout Tolstoy's novel as a narcissistic personage (Symington, 1993), whose self-interest and lack of empathy dominates her behaviour, culminating in the ultimate egocentric act of suicide. It would, therefore, be quite in keeping with her persona that envy would taint her reading experience as well as other elements of her life. The question arises, as a corollary to this, as to whether an envious person will always struggle to have a satisfactory reading experience, creating it as an occasion for envy rather than vicarious enjoyment, or whether the situation is redeemable? Klein seems to take an entrenched position in asserting an envious person can "never be satisfied" (Klein, as cited in Khan, 1975, p. 204), and conflating being envious with a static identity, which is, perhaps, for a psychoanalyst, a curious attitude. The key issue remains, however, that envy (at the point of reading) appears adversely to impact the immersive literary reading experience. I infer that this is because envy is egoic and focused on the self in relation to the other, so awareness of Self is central. This is in opposition to achieving that undifferentiated state of merger with the text to which the reader aspires, thus she may be said not adequately to have let go so as to be able to lose herself in her text.

To further consider this question and bring a personal perspective to this discussion, I interject here another vignette from my own experience as a reader, of the only documented time in my reading journal (over the last seven years) where I note experiencing envy of a character in a novel. The occasion in question comes

from a reading of *The portrait of a lady* (James, 1907/1999), and my envy is of Isabel Archer, the designated lady in question. She has a plethora of suitors, each of whom offers new opportunities to her, but she rejects them all, preferring to remain unattached and free to travel. She then inherits an unexpected legacy, which enables her to fulfil her dream to see the world without financial constraint. I document in my reading journal how I "envy her freedom, her ability not to conform to societal expectations to marry, but most importantly because she has her life ahead of her". As I continue to explore my envy reflexively, some insights emerge. My journal continues: "… I am on the point of retiring; my working life is over; my youth is over. It feels as if things are winding down towards the grave rather than doors opening". I am able to make a poignant link, comparing my own situation at the point of reading with that of the character in my novel. Although I am aware that I feel little empathy for Isabel as a personage, the envy I feel towards her situation actually appears quite straightforward and at some level understandable. Interestingly, my envy for her disappears as soon as she marries, at which point I start to find an empathic connection to her. Further, I recognise that my erstwhile envy for Isabel does not preclude me being able to engage with reading, unlike the reported impact on Anna Karenina, for whom her desire to participate actively meant she was unable to settle to read.

I question whether the difference between my experience and that documented of Anna, is that I was open to explore the meaning of my envy and to process it in such a way as to bring insight. I am aware, however, as I write this, that claiming not to be defensive may in itself be a defence or a blind spot and that it is in any case a continuum and not a discrete binary between defensive and non-defensive. In my process, however, I sought to let go and abandon myself to whatever emerged from the unconscious as I read, and this is probably the nearest I can come to a step towards dropping ego defences. I was quite surprised to discover the envy I identified, and, rather than seek to distract from it or avoid it, I took time to reflect upon its meaning and what it might be telling me about my life and situation. As I explored it reflexively, I was able to connect with some painful

emotions around loss and to own some regrets over my own poor choices coupled with the constraints of ageing, and, in processing it this way, my envy became a conduit to a more benign wistfulness. My recognition of my envy came about not at the point of reading but in retrospect as I journalled and reflected upon my experience. At the point of reading, I could say, along with Anna Karenina, that I wanted to ***be*** Isabel, to sit in the garden and take tea, to repudiate her suitors and to travel to the continent on a limitless budget and without the obligations of work or other commitments and a whole life ahead of me to contemplate. I owned these feelings as they emerged in my reading and went away and reflected upon them and what they were telling me about my life.

For Anna, in the vignette cited, no such self-awareness follows, and, in fact, rather than reflect upon the feelings that were emerging, she starts to become self-justifying in her thinking. Her envy, in fact, makes her more defensive, rather than open to exploring herself. Thus, the issue may be less the envy itself than her failure to adopt a non-defended ego position (as discussed in chapter four), which mitigates against her being able to abandon herself to her reading experience and fully merge with what she is reading. Letting go entails a losing of the self and the ego, and a primitive merging with the Other (the text), but Anna, in her enviousness, does not attain this undifferentiated state but retains an awareness of her Self throughout, which is antithetical to the process of immersive literary reading. Here, again, is illustrated the interlinking of the chain of signifiers in illuminating the process of immersive literary reading: the concept of envy precluding a sufficient degree of ***letting go***, of ***merging*** with the other, or experiencing the self in an ***undifferentiated state***, or ***loosening ego defences***, all processes which complement and are intrinsic to the idea of ***regression*** and engaging a sophisticated paranoid schizoid mindset. Seeking to tease out one process necessarily circles back to the other.

Reverie and liminality

As previously noted, Freud claims that "... the real enjoyment of a literary work derives from the relaxation of tensions in our minds" (1908/2003, p. 33). My sense is that this is only the starting point. The mental relaxation that comes from suspending superego censorship and giving oneself over in uninterrupted concentration to the reading of literary fiction I see as the platform from which previously unconscious knowledge may be contemplated in the meditative state referred to as ***reverie*** (Bachelard, 1968; Bion, 1962; Ehrmann,1966; Milner, 1969). I turn now to an exploration of this process, using Tolstoy's phenomenological description of reverie in *Anna Karenina* (1873-1877/1999) as a starting point.

Although Anna's experience of reading is intermittent and largely unsatisfactory, for a brief time her thoughts are diverted by association with the hero of the novel she is reading to contemplate her own psychic state. At the point of acceding to a moment of reverie, Anna is shown to attain a brief merger with the character in the plot to the point that "suddenly she felt that he must have been ashamed, and that she was ashamed of the same thing" (p. 99). This captures the essence of an undefended connection with the text, leading to an unexpected revelation, bubbling up from her unconscious. Her first thought, in following the narrative of the book, is in connection with the experience of the hero of whom she decides: "***he*** must have been ashamed" (p. 99), but this instantaneously moves into the recognition that it was "***she*** [who] was ashamed" (p. 99), the two merging into one, and her own experience taking over the train of thought.

In this dreamlike mental state, she allows her reverie to take her back to indulge "… her Moscow memories. They were all good and pleasant. She recall[s] the ball and Vronsky and his humble, enamoured gaze, and their relations with one another" (Tolstoy, 1873-1877/1999, p. 99). This typifies the process of reverie, whereby a conscious thought (here brought about by engagement with the text) triggers an evocation of a felt sense or a memory, from which a train of associations emanates, and in which the experiencing individual loses herself in a kind of

meditative trance, such that internal and external, reality and fantasy blur. Milner describes reverie as "absent-mindedness, in which the distinction between fantasy and actuality can be temporarily suspended… in which inside and outside are not clearly differentiated" (1969, p. 40). In order to give oneself over to this dreamlike state, she avers, there needs to be an external container, which Milner refers to as a "cocoon" (1969, p. 269), to provide a protective layer and facilitate the relinquishing of conscious thought and control that gives way to unconscious reverie. In the case of immersive literary reading, I am concluding that this container is the text ***in the process of reading***. The text itself is not *per se* containing until it is in the state of being read, but it becomes the container once it is in the process of being read.

Again, it may be seen how these concepts overlap and intertwine with ideas discussed in other chapters and an intricate chain of interlocking signifiers is needed to reflect the complexity of the nuances of the phenomenon. Reading the text becomes the container to occupy the conscious mind and so facilitate the unconscious train of thought/meditation/reverie that springs from it. The question of actively, willingly letting go (chapter four) and suspending disbelief is one facet of the process, the lifting of ego defences coincident with it another, and the merging of the self/blurring of boundaries between self and Other, reality and fiction another; all are intrinsic to the process and the chain of signification.

Reverie may be seen as a process similar to that of free association (Freud, A., 1968; Freud, 1915-1917/1973), where the subject follows her chain of mental connections until she comes to a point of resistance to go further because the knowledge is unwelcome, or she is unwilling to face it. One of the key differences, however, is that reverie, like dream thinking, mostly occurs in images rather than concepts (Freud, 1900), and this is why it might be aligned to a regressed mental state (another key component in the chain of signification), as "... image comes *before* thought" (Hans, 1977, p. 315). The felt sense/awareness transcends words and precedes reflection.

Anna Karenina's reverie is adulterated by attempts to defend herself at the point where she connects with the sense of disgrace that she is feeling, but in the process "… the feeling of shame grew stronger and some inner voice seemed to say to her, 'warm, very warm, burning!'" (p. 99). This illustrates the strength of the unconscious process. Even though she stops reading at this point, reaching a point of resistance (Freud, 1909/1962), she is sufficiently discombobulated by her thoughts that she continues to confuse reality with fiction and loses her sense of what is happening, "whether the train was moving forwards or backwards or standing still. Was it Annushka who was sitting beside her, or a stranger?" (p. 99). She asks herself "… am I here, myself? Am I myself or another?" (p. 99). The effect on her of this bewilderment is described as "delirious" (p. 99), an apt portrayal of the psychic confusion that may accompany a reader's state of displacement when deep in a process of reverie. Anna's reading experience, though brief and summarily curtailed, is powerful and connects her with aspects of her life and situation which she is not expecting, through her being able to let go and merge momentarily with her reading. The legacy of this brief period of reverie is compelling and has a lingering effect on Anna. I see the liminal space in which this process happens coming about because of the dreamlike state of the reader's consciousness, such that the boundaries between fact and fiction are blurred and a brief moment of adjustment is necessary to re-connect with actual life. This (liminality) I see as another link in the chain of signifiers, it being descriptive of the space inhabited by the immersive literary reader, a kind of no-man's land, split between two worlds.

Winnicott's choice of signifier to embrace this concept is "transitional space" (1953,1967a, 1971), or "potential space" (1971), capturing the transient and intermediate nature of the liminal. It indicates the idea of a journey, moving from one place (or one state of consciousness) to another, but being situated distinctly in-between. My understanding of liminality is that space where two worlds bleed into each other, the threshold between two states, such as dreaming and wakefulness, the place where the boundaries blur (Milner, 1969). It is neither one nor the other, but a third space (Ogden, 1994, 2010) between the two, unique and undifferentiated,

as discussed in chapter four, but more than just being a merged consciousness, it carries with it also the notion of movement.

Symbolically in *Anna Karenina* (Tolstoy, 1873-1877/1999), the train conveys an image of movement, the sense that a journey is in progress, and this is a key consideration in the reading of literary fiction. A text has to ***be being read***. Reading is always a process, the verbal form of the word (present participle/gerund) signifying this ongoing activity. There is momentum; the reader is in a continuous state of transit through her novel, the experience being live and active (even though, as I have shown above, she is necessarily physically inactive). The reading space is, therefore, a liminal space, positioned between reality and fiction, self and other. The reader at the point of reading, *ergo*, may be said to be "... lost in a void of time and space" (Mathew, 2005, p. 384), the liminal space being ephemeral and other worldly.

I conclude the chapter with some critique of the concepts discussed, questioning why initially I am referring to a state of ***regression*** rather than seeing the process as more akin to one of the reader's free floating attention (Freud, 1916/1973), and why I ally reading with paranoid schizoid thinking, given that empathic connection (associated with Klein's (1923, 1958) depressive position) is also in evidence between a reader and her text.

Regression as I am referring to it in this context does not imply abdication of advanced thinking function, but a conscious choice willingly to suspend disbelief (Coleridge, 1817) and voluntarily to give oneself over to a state of mind where the reader allows herself to be awed. It could be argued that the phenomenon being discussed might equally well be construed, rather than as a regression as a form of "free floating attention" or "free association" (Freud, 1916/1973), such as that which the psychoanalyst and analysand respectively adopt in the therapeutic encounter. There are clear similarities in the nature of the mental state to which I am alluding: the loosening of attachment to the actual and concrete, openness to unconscious

communication, and engagement with the creative flow of associations and imaginations.

My argument for linking these receptive mindsets to regression is connected primarily with the centrality of the willing suspension of disbelief which is necessary for the reader of fiction. It could be countered that the analyst also is charged with willingly suspending disbelief, allowing herself to approach her analysand's material with an open mind, the actual veracity of her (the patient's) account being less important than the internal impact upon her, and how she processes it (Freud, 1911). Bion advocated the analyst approaching each new session with her analysand as a blank sheet and without any preconceived ideas or thoughts from previous interactions, in an attitude of curious enquiry. He referred to this as "negative capability", a phrase first coined in 1817 by the Romantic poet John Keats (Rollins, 1958) and described it as the capacity of "being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason" (Bion, 1970, p. 125). This type of mental state requires a loosening of attachment to any particular expectation or interpretation, and requires an attitude of openness and receptivity, such as pertains for the reader being in touch with her own reveries and the thoughts and memories evoked in her as she scans the pages of her book.

The principal difference approaching a therapeutic encounter and reading a novel (apart from the obvious disparity in purpose), I infer, is that in the case of the latter, the reader is not just open to the possibility that the story may not be true, she actively approaches the occupation knowing categorically that it ***is*** a fiction. She goes into it with her eyes open, allowing herself to be temporarily taken over by the world of make-believe. The sort of blind faith which is necessary to maintain this state of mind with respect to fiction differs from the open-mindedness referred to by Freud or Bion, and clearly implies a regression to the state of wonder and naiveté of childhood. I discuss in chapter two an experiment undertaken by Holland (1975) to illustrate the different mindsets with which a reader approaches a work of fiction and a work of non-fiction, the former he attributes to the reader's surrendering her

capacity to evaluate the veracity of what she reads. This does not mean that she suspends all critical function (she may still retain an opinion, for example, about the writing style) but she chooses deliberately to abrogate judgement about whether what she is reading is true, to engage in a state of openness and awe.

As for aligning reading with a paranoid schizoid state of mind, a contra-argument might be advanced to suggest that there is evidence of a depressive mentality (Kahn, 1975) manifest in the reader, as she empathises with the characters in her tale, and that she can be engaged to the point of focusing entirely on the interests and affairs of the (albeit fictitious) other. So strong can this affiliation be, that the reader loses awareness of herself altogether, as she vicariously engages with the lives of those depicted in the story and interests herself only in their affairs, and, as I have discussed in chapter two, feels genuine emotion in relation to their stories (Holland, 2009). As noted earlier, however, the nature of the reader's relationship to the protagonists is necessarily unilateral, both because they are creations of her own psyche, and because, at the point of reading she is merged with them and has no personal relationship with them. Emotions are evoked within her as she identifies with the joys and sorrows of the characters, but it is only insofar as she relates to the experiences portrayed. The nature of her feeling for, and engrossment with, the *dramatis personae* illustrates the split-off mentality characteristic of the paranoid schizoid position, as, whilst in this state, the reader neither retains awareness of the fact that the lives she is absorbed with are fictitious, nor connects with her Self and the reality of her external situation, being mentally taken up in her imagination with the fiction she reads.

Conclusion

Using an extract from *Anna Karenina* (Tolstoy, 1873-1877/1999) as a phenomenological commentary on the experience of immersive literary reading, in this chapter I have explored some key elements of my thesis. To start with, I note the depiction of the need for bodily stillness whilst being mentally active, and how internal preoccupation mitigates against the psychic letting go requisite to lose

oneself in a text. The surrendering of the self I show also as a psychic phenomenon relating to the relinquishing of ego defences and ego awareness, discussing how Anna Karenina failed to drop her egoic concerns and, rather than vicarious connection with the characters in her novel, experienced envy of them. I introduce my theory that the state of mind of the immersive reader of literary fiction may be understood in terms of being regressed, akin to Klein's (1957) paranoid schizoid functioning, but also held in conjunction with mobilising advanced literary and symbolic skills. Traditionally in psychoanalytic theory (Bowie, 1991; Dor, 1998), reading is associated with Oedipal development, triadic capacity being necessary for symbolic understanding, whereas my thesis is that, whilst simultaneously drawing on her capacity for symbolisation, the reader of fiction is in a dyadic relationship with her text, merging with it. I term the state ***sophisticated paranoid schizoid***, it being appropriate and necessary for the reading endeavour, and the accompanying mental splitting between two worlds (real life and the fictitious) being equally apposite in this context, and not a psychic defence, as it might be in other circumstances. In considering the reader's connection with the protagonists in her novel, I find that the occupation demonstrates a reversal of normal developmental processes, in that the reader moves from a position of object usage to object relationship (Winnicott, 1969), the characters morphing to become her own creations in the act of reading. All of these interlinked concepts form part of the chain of signification and synthesise to present my understanding of the complex and nuanced experience of immersive literary reading.

Chapter six: Intersubjectivity

"While the reader ... believes he holds and comprehends the story, it is in effect the story which holds and comprehends the reader" (Felman, 1977, p. 184).

In this chapter I explore the nature of the relationship that pertains between the reader and her text, specifically focusing on the notion of intersubjectivity. I conclude that, in order for reading to be a successful or satisfying experience, with the potential for the transformations which I discuss in chapter seven, there needs to be a unique connection experienced by the engaged immersive reader with her reading material, with particular connection on each side that is best understood in terms of an intersubjective exchange. I draw initially on the work of Jessica Benjamin (1990, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2018), in developing the concepts that she propounds in relation to human interaction, and apply them to the exchanges between reader and literary fiction, in the process of immersive reading. I reference also Rosenblatt's (1960, 1982, 1986, 1994, 1998) thinking about literary art as "... a coming-together, a compenetration, of a reader and a text" (1994, p. 12), which I construe both in the light of being mutually attuned, and in the blurring of boundaries between the two. I then go on to develop these ideas further in the light of Winnicott's notion of the phenomenon of "being found" (1963b, p. 186), and discuss how, unlike normal social interaction, where the individual is either hidden or found, immersive literary reading provides a unique relational matrix in which it is possible for the reader simultaneously ***both*** to hide ***and*** to be found.

As with any satisfactory relationship, there are obligations and responsibilities demanded of each party, and the fact that one of these parties in the case of literary reading is non-human does not, I discovered, preclude a deep level of intersubjective engagement, but adds another dimension to it. I start by setting out what I see as the principal elements of the nature of the relationship between the reader and her novel, highlighting the function of the latter as paralleling that of Bion's (1963, 1965, 1970, 2007b) maternal container, which converts the frightening beta elements of sensory experience, through application of its alpha function, into

benign alpha elements which can be borne, processed and thought about. That a non-human Other might perform this task stimulates some interesting discussion. As a further paradox, I also conclude that not only does the text become a container for the reader, but, engaged in the process of reading, the reader simultaneously acts as container for the text.

In drawing on Rosenblatt's (1994) thinking, where she asserts: "in aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (p. 25), which will be discussed more fully a little later in the chapter, an additional complication arises, in recognising that the intersubjective pair under discussion comprises the reader and her experience of reading. It is, however, difficult, if not impossible, to separate the reading from that which is being read, so the Other in this intersubjective exchange can be seen both as the text itself and the process of reading. Rosenblatt acknowledges this dilemma:

> It would be less confusing to use the reading act itself as the general paradigm of the aesthetic experience; it would then become clear that the "object" of aesthetic contemplation is what the perceiver makes of his responses to the artistic stimulus… The reader contemplates his own shaping of his evocation from the text ... (1994, p. 31).

I attempt to hold this tension in the discussion which ensues.

The chapter finishes with consideration of the transpersonal dimension of reading, and my conclusion that, in taking the reader outside of herself, reading can facilitate connection to humanity on a global level.

Attunement

My first point, which is, perhaps, almost too obvious to need stating, is that there must be a sufficiently positive relationship between the reader and her text for reading to fulfil its potential to be a successful and generative experience. I consider in chapter four the necessity of the reader being able to let go of ego concerns (Milner, 1934/1952, 1950/2010) and abandon herself to her reading, in order to be in

a sufficiently receptive state for the requisite immersion and in-depth engagement to take place. I explore also the nature of the facilitating environment necessary to foster this state, namely the interpersonal considerations of having no external impingements, and no social agenda, as well as the need for the reader intrapsychically to be without mental preoccupations, and laying aside her normal psychic defences. These conditions relate to the person of the reader as an individual. I recognise, however, that reading is not a unilateral experience. For reading to be a successful experience, it does not depend exclusively on the reader, and there are also issues to consider with regard to the other party (in this case, the novel), and the relationship between the two. I come now to unpack this relationship in more depth, and to think about the effects of intersubjectivity on the process of immersive literary reading.

My first point is that the reader and her novel must be sufficiently well attuned. Adopting nomenclature from Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1998; Fonagy, 2001; Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975; Schore, 1994, 2003a, 2003b; Stern, 1991; Wallin, 2007), highlights the parallel process I am discussing here, in recognising that a key component in the successful coming together of reader and novel is ***attunement***. The developmental imperative, which the theorists cited above propound, for primary caregiver and infant to be attuned, is, similarly, I conclude, *sine qua non* for a successful relationship between reader and text. Whether primarily through a shared enjoyment of the genre or writing style, turns of phrase, grammatical nuances, affinity with the ambience of the text and its evocations, overlap between the reader's life experience and the subject matter of the story, and/or, indeed, her attraction to the culture or historical period being portrayed, there needs to be sufficient harmony between the reader's interest/life experience and her novel to engage her in reading.

Of course, attunement is experienced on a spectrum, as Winnicott (1953) recognises in his discussions of acceptable maternal provision and failure, coining the phrase "good enough mothering" (p. 92) to capture the concept of a sufficiently

satisfactory parenting experience, without any expectation of the possibility of a perfect match, and part of what designates *good enough* in the context of parenting, is caregivers' ability to provide their offspring with mirroring which is both contingent and marked (Fonagy et al., 2004; Green, 2003). Contingent mirroring (the demonstration of an empathic attitude, where the child feels understood and that her feelings are valid) stands alongside marked mirroring, which provides the kind of containment which models a capacity to cope, to be sufficiently detached as not to be overwhelmed by a frightening or distressing experience. To apply these principles to the experience of reading, I conclude that the text needs to offer the reader an accurate representation of herself, reflected back in the story/evocations she perceives (contingent mirroring), and at the same time a relationship that is slightly removed from the intensity of the emotion felt, which acts to contain the unbearable aspects of it (marked mirroring). In attachment terms, therefore, good enough attunement in the reading relationship may occur when there is sufficient resonance, a sense of being on the same wavelength, as well as an element of distance between reader and text, which is facilitated by the literary nature of the novel, as well as its being fictitious, and so once removed from reality.

The type of reading which Rosenblatt (1994) describes as "aesthetic" (p. 21), which concept I discuss in more detail later in this chapter, is associated with a quality of attention in the moment, and is focused on the immediate experience of the reader. She propounds: "In aesthetic reading ... the reader's primary concern is with what happens ***during*** the actual reading event" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 24). My belief is that sustaining this quality of engagement requires a level of harmony between reader and text. There must be good enough attunement between the reading couple, otherwise the undertaking will be unsatisfactory, or even abandoned altogether.

Reviewing my own journal entries in this regard, I note copious times when I have given up on a novel, or found myself skimming over sections of it, not feeling sufficiently attuned/engaged to immerse at depth. For example, on one occasion I

wrote of *Daniel Deronda* (Eliot, 1876/2003): "… I feel quite irritated with the author … and wonder why it is a classic. I did not let go. I did not make room for reverie. I did not feel known. I was not transformed." On another occasion my journal chronicled my experience of reading *The ragged trousered philanthropists* (Tressell, 1914/2012), of which I note: "I am finding it quite tedious, particularly the long passages of political rhetoric (which I skip over). It reads in places more like a socialist manifesto than a novel and is irking me."

Whilst it might be fascinating to surmise why, on these occasions, at these particular times, I was unable to engage with these texts, and whether it be about the context or circumstances of the reading, or, indeed, something intrinsic to my relationship with the novels themselves, the point I am making here is simply that for some reason at the point of reading, ***the novel and I were not sufficiently attuned***. The relationship did not work well. For me as a reader the experience was frustrating and disappointing. Qualitatively it lacked in-depth engagement. Rosenblatt (1982, 1986, 1994) would construe this more as ***efferent*** reading (as opposed to ***aesthetic*** reading), where the reader's intention is to read in order to acquire knowledge, rather than simply enjoy the reading experience. I return to this discussion also later in the chapter.

As I write this commentary on my journal reflections, I recognise that, because of the lack of attunement I experienced with the texts on these occasions, my attention wandered from the text itself to think about (and adversely judge) the author. I experienced what might be construed as an Oedipal intrusion (Britton, Feldman & O'Shaughnessy, 1989) on the reader/novel dyad, by considering *per se* the writing, and by implication the writer. In an engaged, attuned relationship, such as that which Stern (1991) documents between mother and baby, and to which template I am referring in considering the relationship between novel and reader, the bond is dyadic, between two parties only. The maternal figure gets to know and accommodates herself to her offspring, tuning in to, and interpreting, the infant's emotional experience. The necessity to consider a third party (as might traditionally

happen with the advent of a new baby or demands of a partner) creates an incursion into this parent/baby pair. In the case of reading, the protagonist couple are the reader and the text where an intimate, intersubjective bond is set up between them. What occurred for me in the reading of both *Daniel Deronda* (Eliot, 1876/2003) and Tressell's (1914/2012) novel, was that the dyadic bond that I might have established with the work of fiction was intercepted by a third party, as, in my journal, I note frustrations with the authors. This Oedipal incursion precluded the potential of either reading experience being generative or transformative for me. The key point here, then, is that dyadic attunement was hindered; I was unable to maintain a regressed, merged mentality and intersubjective engagement, *ergo*, was contaminated.

I now cite an extract from my journal relating to a qualitatively different reading experience, where attunement was in evidence:

> Starting to read Hardy's *The woodlanders* (1887/2004) was like putting on a pair of bedroom slippers. I immediately relaxed into the rich descriptions and allowed myself to slow down and savour the words on the page… I consciously felt myself slow down and luxuriate in Hardy's evocations, in no hurry to speed on, find out what happens or have any motive other than total immersion in the story. It was a most indulgent feeling, and a sense of pure pleasure, both actual and anticipated, trusting to … the process that I was about to be taken on an engaging journey.

Straightaway a perceptible difference may be discerned. In stark contrast to skimming swiftly over passages of a novel where I did not feel attuned, I note here a slowing down, a relaxation, a savouring of the moment, where I give myself over to the experience without reservation. I appear to trust what I expect to follow, the journey on which I am about to embark. There is no hint that I am anxious to reach the end (though there is curiosity about the plot), but a clear faith in the process that is to unfold and ability to engage with it ***in the moment*** at its pace. This, I suggest, typifies an experience where reader and novel are in a state of good enough attunement.

It is apparent from the journal entries and commentary upon my reading experience, that in those instances where I have been sufficiently attuned, I was able to sustain an aesthetic attitude throughout the process. Rosenblatt clarifies: "in aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (1994, p. 25). Where I felt a lack of attunement in my reading, even though I had started out in this vein, I found I was unable to maintain an aesthetic attitude and so, although I gained some knowledge of the plot of the texts I read, it felt qualitatively different. I conclude, therefore, that attunement is a key factor in sustaining an aesthetic approach to immersive, literary reading, which, in turn facilitates its potential to be generative and satisfying.

The reading experience as a co-creation

In considering engaged immersive reading as an intersubjective process, the second point I find, implicit in this, is that the reading experience is co-created in the moment. The reader is not simply a passive recipient, introjecting wholesale a static narrative from the pages of her book, but is, at the point of reading, collaboratively creating her unique version of the author's writing. As Knights elaborates: "... the text is not like an inkblot into which you can read whatever you fancy. But at the same time, it is not a jug which pours a set of complete, fixed meanings into your head" (Knights, 1995, p. 27). It is about a shared engagement and the interplay of two subjectivities, interdependent in the process, that together co-create something new, which is different from the sum of the two contributions.

Unless the reader is prepared to collaborate actively (by focusing her attention, concentrating, engaging her imagination, allowing her feelings to be stirred) in the reading endeavour, the text remains inert marks on a page. "... ***All*** reading is 'reading in'", asserts Knights (1995, p. 36). The stage for the unfolding drama is within the mind of the reader herself. Analogies such as that of the script of a play turned into a drama by the theatre company (Knights, 1995), or the musical score converted by an orchestra into a symphony (Rosenblatt, 1960, 1998)

convey the relationship between text and reader, and symbolise the role of each in the unfolding process.

The nature of the giving/receiving exchange is captured by Knights, when he recognises the demands on the reader:

> As readers we become involved as persons, not as perceptual machines, an involvement akin to the practice of empathy in counselling. As we process a text we are engaged in an alternating rhythm of dissociation and reintegration which is scary and satisfying by turns. We have, so to speak, to put out fragments of ourselves, see them scatter as they attach to centrifugal objects, and yet find the patience and courage in ourselves to await their return (1995, p. 30).

The full subjectivity of the reader is required in order to engage meaningfully in the process. She is not simply a passive deciphering device, decoding the messages on the page to acquire cognitive understanding of the characters and plot, but is heart and soul immersed and given over to the undertaking, with all her humanity and personality.

To begin with, therefore, before a piece of literary fiction can be read, I recognise there needs to exist an unspoken contract between the text and the reader. The reader is so-called (and only becomes so) by virtue of the fact that she engages with a text, with a clear intention and commitment to read it. The book, on the other hand, is written on the tacit understanding that it exists to be read. Furthermore, it only comes to life in the mind and imagination of its readers and has no value outside of this. This, then, is the initial complementary transaction which takes place between the two parties. Each needs the other in order to exist. Much as Winnicott's often misquoted statement implies with regard to human development: "there is no such thing as an infant [apart from the maternal provision]" (1960, p. 39), so it could be argued that, in a much more literal way, there is no such thing as a reader (apart from that which she reads), or, indeed, no such thing as a text (apart from the mind of the reader). I cannot be a reader or define myself as such outside of the act of reading. The gerund (or verbal noun)

"reading" here indicates the ongoing, present continuous nature of the process, and so highlights the fact that the act of reading, the coming together of reader and text occurs at moments in time, and at those moments, both parties are engaged together. One cannot exist without the other. There would be no reading without either reader or text.

The nature of the intersubjective relationship

I now consider the paradigm of intersubjective engagement in the context of the reader and text, in order to gain greater understanding of the nature of the relationship between them. I draw, here, on the work of Benjamin (1990, 1995, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2018), and develop her insights with regard to psychoanalysis in connection with the phenomenon of the immersive reading experience. Intersubjectivity challenges the active/passive binary, which Benjamin (1998) applies to psychoanalysis as traditionally being seen as the divide between the one who cannot yet speak, is wordless (the patient) and the one who articulates, puts words around processes and stories (the analyst). She proposes that reality is much less defined than this and that: "...grasping the other's viewpoint means striving to dissolve the complementary opposition of the subject and object that inevitably appears and reappears in the practice and theory of psychoanalysis" (Benjamin, 1998, p. 6). It is not so much about the passive one who is being done to, and the active one with all the answers, but an intersubjective exchange where each affects the other, and the answers emerge in the course of the interaction within the relationship.

Similarly, also, with reading, I have found that the reader is not simply the passive recipient of the writing in the text, (which, like the analyst, might be viewed as the one with the words). She does not simply imbibe them wholesale as a package, but as she reads the words, she draws on her own active imagination, her recollections of her own life history, and her reverie of personal experiences that are triggered by the words on the page, and the narrative and associations combine together to form the experience of her (own, individual) reading, which exists

within her own imagination. The characters she engages with in the process of reading her novel are created in her own mind's eye. The process is a dance that requires two subjectivities to work together, a joint enterprise, which requires active and passive input from both sides. In the same way as the analyst must be a participant in the transference and not simply an observer of it, so the reader must engage with the process, allowing herself to be drawn in: reading the story, imagining the setting and the characters, drawing resonances with her own experience and (often) recognising herself in it. She is not only an outsider, an observer, but also a participant in the story. It is impossible for the reader not to be implicated if she is fully engaged, and it is this merging of identities that is so powerful.

Benjamin writes (of psychoanalysis) that the key point in the exchange is where there is a moment of cross-identification, where the analyst identifies with the patient, grappling for articulation and understanding, and the patient identifies with the analyst, in being able to find the words of recognition and comprehension. At those points, each loses her own identity, and otherness is dissolved. "If the patient must "become" the analyst, the analyst must also "become" the patient (Benjamin, 1998, p. 9). In other words, cognitive insight alone, imparted from the position of detached observer is not sufficient to bring about change. For therapeutic benefit to occur in the analytic encounter, there needs to be an experience of cross-identifying, an experiential recognition/knowing of the Other. I find that this principle also applies to the reading couple. In a successful immersive reading experience, it is important for the reader to be able to merge with that which she reads, and for elements of the fictional narrative to bleed into her life story, such that identities are blurred and the temporary experience of being the other can bring understanding, possibly a new perspective and even psychic transformation for the reader. Merger is not a permanent state, however, but part of a fluid process of exchange. Moments of the reader feeling herself conjoined to her text succeed moments of stepping back and absorbing details of the plot, much as the dance between analyst and analysand enjoys times of intensity where words

are unnecessary and connection occurs, coupled with periods of analysis and interpretation.

I further recognise that the nature of the relationship the reader has with her text at these moments of merger may be understood as a form of regression, replicating as it does the primitive state of infant and primary caregiver, where there is no clear distinction between them. One of the hallmarks of mature psychic functioning might be construed, in Kleinian terms at least, as the capacity for empathy (Klein 1923, 1958), i.e. the ability to think about the other as Other, separate from the self, with his/her own needs, feelings, etc. The type of merger alluded to above, where the child, as yet with insufficient sense of self, is unable to distinguish self from (m)other, would be seen as a primitive state characteristic of early infancy (Waddell, 2002). Moments of merger in adult life, as typified in an analytic setting, and, importantly in the context of this discussion, in the process of immersive literary reading, may, therefore, I conclude, be viewed as regressive experiences. I do not imply psychopathology by using this term, but merely wish to recognise the relational state that pertains at certain times during the process of reading. To lose oneself in this way has echoes of the primal relationship to principal caregiver, though in the case of reading, as I have shown, the dependency is not unilateral, but bilateral, each relying on the other. It does not, *ergo*, replicate the power dynamic of parent and baby, and, indeed, the question might be posed: "who is mother and who is child?" there being no hierarchy in the relationship, as I have shown. Perhaps there is in the reading dyad, then, a more truly equal form of intersubjectivity than pertains in human/human relationships.

I now develop this thinking further, to consider, in a more nuanced way, the nature of the Other in reading, and reflect upon how ***other*** it really is, it being a creation of the reader's imagination.

Counterpoint to object relations

A frequent focus of Benjamin's writing on intersubjectivity concerns awareness of the other as Other. Mother, for example, is not simply an object who fulfils (or not) the infant's needs by providing (or not) food, soothing, stimulation, etc., but she is another subject in her own right, with her own needs and aspirations. The notion of intersubjectivity may be viewed as a counterpoint to object relations theories (Klein, 1930, 1946; Winnicott, 1963a, 1969).

When considering the intersubjectivity of the reading dyad, I conclude a unique relationship pertains where the Other of the text morphs into a subjective creation of the reader, and thus raises the question of how subjective each of the two subjects (reader and reading material) really is. The subjectivity of the novel, while having a definite, objective shape and identity that is fixed (perhaps even more static than a human subject, who is open to psychic changes over time with the internalising of life experiences, etc.), is part-created by, and exists within the psyche of, the reader. I see this as something of a reversal of the classic object relations model of development (Winnicott, 1960, 1963a, 1963b, 1969), where the Other is first construed entirely as a subjectively perceived object and only through a process of disillusionment, as the child becomes aware that the Other does not always comply with its (subjective) fantasies, and exists externally in its own right, does it then become a real, objective Other, available for true relationship.

The Other of the reader's experience in reading may be seen, *au contraire*, to move from an objective description on the pages of the book, to an individual subjective perception within her mind, which remains her own imaginative view of that character or plot. The subjectivity of the novel, therefore, is a subjectivity partly made of the reader's own subjectivity. The reader's experience of it is both idiosyncratic, a subjectivity entirely personal to the individual reader, and also in its own right, an objective Other, unchangeable in the sense that the plot/personalities of the *dramatis personae* cannot change at the whim of the reader, but merely her perception at the time of the characters and experience of the text.

Furthermore, the same reader's subsequent readings of the same text may be interpreted differently on each occasion, as the reader's situation and life experience will affect the way she construes and relates to her fiction. That she cannot create a definitive or static take on the novel, is due to the experience being only in the moment at the point of reading at any one time. It is ephemeral, although the memory of it may linger. Something of the reading experience will be internalised, and its legacy live on until the text is re-read and a new encounter with it supersedes the previous one. Thus, the other of the text is constantly being created and recreated in the reader's imagination and it is the reader's fantasies of what she reads that are the essence and matrix of the immersive reading experience. Unlike object relations theories, where the aim is to achieve the mature position of recognising the other as completely separate and outside of the individual's fantasised omnipotent control, the success of the reading experience depends upon the reader being able to continue to create fantasies and engage meaningfully with these, eschewing the perception of a concrete, objective reality, hence my belief that the relationship between reader and text may be seen as a reversal of the maturational processes of normal human relations.

Being the Other

All of these ideas, however, start from the perspective of the individual as a subject and her relationships with others as objects or subjects in her life. Another important vertex of this position which I now explore, is the sense of being the Other in someone else's world, not from the egoic angle of wondering about the impression one makes on the Other and what the Other thinks of one, but the experience of ***being known*** by the Other. This may happen fleetingly in everyday life during moments of particular empathic understanding, or, indeed, with, for example, a partner or lifelong friend who knows one so well and can predict likes/dislikes and one's emotional needs and reactions. There is something very gratifying about this type of being known (which might be viewed as another facet of attunement), and I discovered it is also an important phenomenon which can occur in immersive literary reading. I have experienced profound moments of

being known in this way through my own reading experiences, and cite here primary data examples taken from my journal to illustrate my argument:

> As I read this afternoon, I am preoccupied with the awareness of my father having been readmitted to hospital yesterday, in the latter stages of his life. The difficulty getting communication with the hospital is incredibly wearing, and the prospect of the visit I must make tonight fills me with dread. I don't know the hospital, or where it is, so the travelling there generates anxiety, but memories of a couple of weeks ago and the battles with another hospital to get him discharged are also fresh in my mind. I foresee the interminable hours spent by the bedside, in the most dismal of surroundings, with no hope or joy and a battle to get him back to his care home. Being unable to focus on reading journal articles, I "treated" myself to my novel (Tolstoy's (1899/2014) novel *Resurrection*). This felt comforting, indulgent, and, surprisingly, I found myself not all that distracted as I read.
>
> I read of Nekhlyudov finding himself in his drawing room confronted with pictures of his parents. Of his mother, I read (pp. 102-103): "He remembered how, during the latter period of her illness, he had simply wished her to die. He had said to himself that he wished it for her sake, that she might be released from her suffering, but in reality he wished to be released from the sight of her sufferings for his own sake." Had Tolstoy been living inside my head at that moment, he might have seen no more clearly what I was thinking and feeling … The synchronicity of this experience is striking…

Seeing myself reflected back to me at that point, with the grief and conflicting emotions I was experiencing being articulated within a work of literary art, I experienced as a profoundly healing moment. My circumstances had not changed, the ordeal I was facing still loomed ahead, but I connected with a sense of being intimately known by an Other, and recognised myself as being part of humanity at an existential level, my experience being common to mankind, and therefore something which transcended me as an individual and made me part of something much bigger. This came despite the fact that, or, perhaps, because, the Other with whom I was engaging was not a human individual with a personality, open to a dialogic relationship with me, but a work of literary fiction.

Germane to this discussion is the question of synchronicity. The saying, sometimes attributed to Buddha, sometimes to other wisdom teachers: "when the student is ready, the teacher appears," might equally be applied to my reading experience here, as, it seems that when I, as a reader was ready, the appropriate text

appeared. The question of this synchronicity I find an intriguing one, and, indeed, wrote in my reading journal: "I simply don't understand how it happens"; "how can it be?". Giving it further thought, I recognised that this is exactly the point. I found neither literary nor psychoanalytic theory adequately to explain the phenomenon, although one might theorise about links to a manifestation of the collective unconscious (Jung, 1930/2010). It remains something of a mystery, and herein is its interest, it being outside of the scope of human control. The point I am making at this juncture, is to recognise that synchronicity is a factor in the powerful experience of being known that may occur in the context of attuned, immersive literary reading. This example of my reading of *Resurrection* (Tolstoy, 1899/2014) would probably not have been so poignant to me at any other time in my life, but I was tuned in to end-of-life experiences with an aged relative and so homed in on it, and it took on enormous personal significance for me in that moment.

This experience of being known in the innermost places of the self, I submit, is uncommon. It may occur over the course of a psychoanalysis, where the privileged intimate knowledge of the analyst, accumulated from private sharing of the patient crystallises into a profound and devastating or liberating insight. It occurs rarely in normal human interactions. As will be seen from the above example, however, the reader, if open to such knowledge, may experience such a depth of being known within the pages of her novel. To have acknowledged myself found out in this way when reading a novel, I experienced as both disconcerting and comforting at the same time. I was naked in the face of an exposing, knowing Other, from whom I could not escape. It was also a wonderful experience, as there was the sense that I no longer needed to defend myself against those thoughts and might allow myself to acknowledge what I was thinking. It was an intensely private experience that did not involve any other spectator, as it was all happening within my own psyche. My thoughts and feelings were recognised. They were articulated, and it brought comfort.

Back in the 1960s, Winnicott wrote of a phenomenon akin to this: the experience of ***being found***. He describes the clinical analysis of a boy, whom he regarded as engaging in "... a sophisticated game of [psychic] hide-and-seek, in which ***it is a joy to be hidden, but disaster not to be found***" (Winnicott, 1963b, p. 186). He theorises that human beings are, at core, essentially isolated and alone, and desire to preserve their individual integrity and right not to communicate at a deep level, whilst also harbouring a strong desire to be found by an Other. I suggest that the art of immersive literary reading provides simultaneously an opportunity for both these experiences: to be hidden and to be found. The reader, by virtue of adopting an aesthetic attitude and engaging in the activity of reading, is withdrawing from active social engagement, isolating herself from the everyday world in order to withdraw into her own private psychic space. If, at certain points in the process of reading, she is fortunate enough, as I was in the extract depicted above, to experience herself ***found*** by what she reads, she can experience the joy of being profoundly known, whilst still within the matrix of an intensely safe, private environment. Reading offers the possibility of this unique experience.

Another example, a couple of months after my father's subsequent death a few weeks later, also illustrates the phenomenon of feeling intimately known by an Other through a synchronous reading experience. I return to my reading journal:

> I picked up *Lady Chatterley's lover* (Lawrence, 1928/2007) yesterday and read in the opening paragraph a summation of exactly how I have been feeling:
>
> "Ours is essentially a tragic age ... The cataclysm has happened, we are among ruins ... It is rather hard work: there is now no smooth road into the future, but we go round, or scramble over the obstacles. We've got to live, no matter how many skies have fallen" (Lawrence, 1928/2007, p. 1). That sense of the futility of life, things feeling desolate, and being "among ruins," with "skies hav[ing] fallen" was exactly my portion. One bereavement followed by another and now another amounted to my world seeming to be in ruins and all remaining paths to the future promising a continuous catalogue of losses to come. It was somehow comforting to read those words and resonate with the reality of the bleakness of life.

A few days later, I wrote:

> I never would have expected to identify with Lady Chatterley but am finding myself increasingly connected with her sentiments. Walking home this morning, with a very heavy heart, feeling the futility of life and struggling to find anything worthwhile to engage with, my attention was drawn to a large pyracantha bush, from which was emanating an almost deafening chirping sound, and, as I neared it, I noticed dozens of little sparrows sitting on top, their feathers blowing in the wind, singing their hearts out. I was moved, and recognised that one of the few things that touches me at the moment is nature. Picking up my novel when I returned, I read how Connie Chatterley, herself feeling dead inside and struck by the cold, lifelessness of all around her, stumbles upon the hen coop where Mellors protects his chickens, and she sees the first hatchlings taking little tottering steps as they hatch out. She is so struck by the beauty of this, that she weeps. Reading Lawrence's evocative descriptions of Lady Chatterley's inner state, and the tenderness of her encounter with the young chicks resonated deeply with my experience… I recognise that deep sense of being known again, the awareness that my current psychic state is known to an Other and part of the human condition, and this is profoundly gratifying.

My journal describes an experience of being found at a deeply personal and meaningful level through the pages of my novel. That my most personal intimate life is not unique to just my own experience, but is a common phenomenon, shared by mankind, was a very meaningful realisation. In my psychotherapy training, I had read glibly of Carl Rogers's (1961) famous affirmation that those elements of life which one might consider intensely personal and individual are known across humanity the world over, and those universally acknowledged also the most intensely personal, but through this experience of truly feeling known through reading, I identified experientially with the full force of this powerful paradoxical axiom, experiencing in the moment a powerful direct connection between the personal and the universal.

The global connection

Slowly I began to recognise that the deeper I journeyed into my own personal psyche, the more connected I became to universal humanity. The more in-depth I recognised my own inner processes and thoughts, the more I realised that I was part of a greater community, had an existential connection with my fellow human beings. I was at the same time aware of a powerful understanding of myself as an

individual, that also linked me to the Other in a more global sense. In order to know herself, Benjamin writes:

> I go "outside" to the manifold to bring what I find "inside," to connect with and recognize myself in others I read and know ... [I] find an underlying thread that ties together disparate things, to turn the many into one without reducing or dedifferentiating (Benjamin, 2005, p. 188).

Exploring the Other holds up a mirror to the self, and looking deeply into the self reflects the experience of the Other. The experience of the many is the experience of the one, but it is not devalued or minimised because of its ubiquity, and still remains vividly and meaningfully personal. I find, similarly, that immersive literary reading has the potential for transpersonal connection, as the experiences of those depicted in literary fiction hold up a mirror to the intimate details of readers' lives, and readers have a sense of connection to the wider readership of the text, and engaging together in what it means to be human in a way that transcends just the individual.

According to Benjamin, who quotes Teresa Brennan (1992), we derive energy when we are given attention by others. She suggests, however, that "we receive energy of a different kind when we receive through giving attention to the other" (Benjamin, 2005, p. 187). In giving ourselves over to the Other – in such a manner, I am inferring, as we might do if engrossed in the pages of a novel – we connect with what Benjamin refers to as the "Big Energy" (2005, p. 187) (the transcendent, transpersonal, or God) and are taken out of our selves and the day-to-day concerns of the "Little Energy" (p. 187), which focuses on the ego and interests of the individual self. Discovering Benjamin's terminology for this seemingly ineffable phenomenon was a pivotal moment in my understanding of experience.

Primary data from my reading journal entries corroborate these sentiments as I have noted on various occasions when I have read in order to seek out some personal epiphany, rather than giving myself over to the Other of the book and allowing any such insights to emerge (or not) in the process of reading. On these

occasions, where I have found myself reading with the active intention of seeking transformational experiences, using Benjamin's language, I might be said to be caught up in the Little Energy of self-seeking. Where the ego is dropped, however, my consciousness is expanded and there is potential to connect transpersonally with the Big Energy and universal truths, which can be personally transformational. From Rosenblatt's (1982, 1986, 1994) perspective the former (Little Energy) might also be seen as reading with an efferent attitude, thinking about what I am going to take away from the reading (albeit in a different way from the idea of acquiring knowledge, but looking for something more), and so the aesthetic is bypassed. Reading with an ulterior motive, whether to elicit specific information, better myself, or, indeed, seek eureka moments, precludes my engaging with an aesthetic attitude, which, in turn, means the quality of my reading experience is compromised, and the opportunity for more universal connection missed. I return to consider further this transpersonal dimension, after I have first examined in a little more detail another facet of the nature of the relationship between the reader and that which she reads, and what this unique association affords.

The non-human Other

A key element in the understanding of the intersubjective exchange which takes place between reader and novel is the fact that one of the subjectivities involved (the text) is non-human. It is, *ergo*, not constrained by ego defences or other anthropocentric concerns, and so offers the reader the possibility of relating to another subject that has no personal agenda or desire. Additionally, I conclude, by virtue of its aesthetic, literary quality, it facilitates the reader in accessing frightening or painful experiences that might otherwise be unbearable to acknowledge. I find that, by transcending the boundaries of individual human concerns, the non-human subject opens the way for the reader, also, to connect transpersonally, with humanity at large, and, in particular, that section of humanity which has also shared in reading the novel in question. I now examine each of these points.

The first statement is that the book, one of the two subjectivities engaged in the reading relationship under discussion, is not human. Whilst its creator is human, and so it is born out of personal understanding, the novel itself, is inanimate, having a separate identity from its writer, even though it might reflect much of her character and biography, and the parties in the reading dyad are reader and text, the latter being non-human.

For the very reason that the novel is not a living person, it offers the reader the possibility of relating to an Other which is not invested in human, egoic concerns or seeking to elicit a particular response through the relationship. It is a subject without desire, without need, and devoid of motive to manipulate. Any human subject, even the most ostensibly altruistic, such as an infant's primary caregiver, has some individual motivation in her interactions with other people, and is in some way affected by what happens in the relationship (Waddell, 2002; Winnicott, 1949, 1963a, 1969). Human relating even of the most apathetic kind is never subject-neutral. However deeply repressed her feelings and responses might be, even a sociopath or psychopath has some personal investment in behaving the way she does (Black, 2013), her sadism and masochism serving to meet an emotional need (Tuchler, 1965). *Au contraire*, literary fiction has, *per se*, no unconscious history, no axe to grind and no investment in determining the subjective response of its reader. This is not to deny that the author might have some unconscious motivation for writing the way she does, but this does not alter the fact that the work itself is unencumbered by unconscious emotional baggage or personal need for gratification of any kind. This unique quality pertains because it is a non-human subject.

The reader may, therefore, engage with the literary work from a less defended position than she might approach a relationship with another human. The conscious and unconscious dynamics of normal societal relating are suspended, and such transformational epiphanies as might occur in the course of reading take place within the reader's psyche, and not in the external, social arena. Any

censorship which the reader exerts upon herself in the process of reading is purely an internal process and does not impinge upon the Other. I describe such an eventuality in chapter seven, where I note from my reading journal an occasion when, in the process of reading *The house of mirth* (Wharton, 1905/1997), I was aware of stopping myself from relating at depth to the scenario about which I was reading, because the truths it portrayed were too unpalatable for me to consider at the time. On the occasion alluded to here, it was my own psychic development that was potentially depleted by my unwillingness to search myself for resonances; the Other (the text) was unaffected.

It could be argued that its non-humanity renders the novel an object rather than a subject, but I would counter that the nature of the relationship between reader and text is one of two subjectivities because, although it may be an asymmetrical relationship, it is reciprocal. Reading, it can be argued, happens in a space of thirdness (Benjamin, 2018; Ogden, 1994, 1999), which is the product of two subjectivities coming together to co-create something separate, which is greater than, and has an existence apart from, the sum of the two individuals. Benjamin uses the analogy of dance to illustrate how the performance of the choreography of two partners is mutually created, and yet stands outside each of them. She writes: "This reciprocal interaction, jointly-experienced, creates a shared Third that transforms both giver and receiver" (2018, p. 13). I find the same is true of immersive literary reading, where the product of the coming together of reader and text is a unique shared creation. This is a world away from the binary object relations of doing and being done to, of subject and object.

The second point I wish to explore is that, in addition to being non-human, and so having no investment in a certain type of engagement with the reader, the novel might be characterised as a work of art, and, by virtue of such, has particular aesthetic, literary properties that provide a matrix for the reader to revisit and engage with her own private reality, which might, in other contexts, be intolerable. Knights (1995) shares with Rosenblatt (1986) the recognition of the distinction of

approaching a text with an aesthetic attitude (which implies particular qualities of slow, engaged reading), in contrast to efferent reading where the aim is to gain knowledge of some kind. He also, however, discusses the question of what might constitute a ***literary*** work, and how this might be defined at the opposite end of the spectrum of literature to a reference text, for example. The term ***literary*** carries value judgment with it. The early 1900s saw the notion of literature as a canon of great books that provided a particular commentary on English heritage, and the Victorians would have categorised literature as that which had a moral, or an incitement to human virtues or wisdom. For Knights, however, the defining characteristic of ***literary*** is the fact that literature is odd or removed from normal life. It employs a different type of language from that in everyday usage, including specific literary devices, which singles it out from the soap opera of daily living. Knights believes that ***oddity*** is the point and that, in daily living we become desensitised to life, and unaware of political or moral issues as we become accustomed to living with them. "Accordingly, the function of literary texts is to wake us up, to depict things in ways that are new and shocking" (Knights, 1995, p. 29).

Reflecting on my choice of reading material throughout this research (novels selected purely for their personal appeal and seemingly randomly), it emerges that those with which I derived a meaningful connection, and which have been the subject of transformational insight, were all set in the 19th or early 20th century. As I have pondered this and wondered about any significance it may have outside of personal preference, it appears that the temporal disjunction between the novel and me as reader has provided a space for a higher level of mirroring than might have been possible with a literary fiction of the present day. Thus, the elements of the plot and characters with which I identified were transferences at a more global level, of connection with the human condition at large, rather than specifically limited to similarities of a more physical time-bound nature.

Much as the therapeutic relationship is artificial in that its parameters/ boundaries set it apart from everyday life, whilst providing a reflection of it, in a similar way, I view literary fiction as outside of the sphere of the mundane, even though the stories it relates might be recurring human themes of workaday life. This very extraordinary character of literature is what sets it apart. The artificial frame draws attention to the content within, just as the literal frame around a work of art focuses attention on the picture inside and conveys the message that it is separate from reality (Leader, 2008). This aesthetic literary oddness is the container which enables the reader to look at unpalatable subjects which might not be able to be borne in reality.

I am indebted to Asibong's (2015) writing in relation to moving images for helping to articulate my thinking on this issue. He writes (of cinematic art) as offering "the spectator an opportunity to work consciously and unconsciously with representations of unbearable psychic and psychosocial experience ... that may hitherto have been thought unrepresentable or simply not thought at all" (p. 87). The same, I have found, is true for the text. It may be seen as a literary container (Bion, 1962, 1965, 1970, 2007b; Cartwright, 2010), which holds and transforms unendurable aspects of human experience into something more manageable that may be faced and contemplated. Bion (1962, 1965, 2007a) writes of terrifying elements of experience, or "nameless dread" (1962, p. 96), and the possibility of transforming these "beta elements" (1962, p. 7) or "undigested facts" (p. 7) into something more benign (or "alpha elements" (p. 7)), by the action of "alpha function" (p. 6), which, for the infant, happens through the intervention of maternal engagement, and is essentially the capacity to face and think about what the sensory material means. For the reader, I believe this can happen through the intermediary of the containment of the text. My two earlier personal examples bear this out.

The manner in which issues are presented and the story is told, being showcased in an aesthetically pleasing literary style, with evocative descriptions which often include recognition of the psychic state of the characters and their

private thoughts and feelings (something which, incidentally, can only be inferred with the visual arts), is compelling for the reader, and takes her into a receptive psychic state, where she may explore elements of her own life which might previously have been repressed, that are being symbolised in the narrative. Engaged with the story when immersed in literary fiction, the reader finds herself faced with scenarios, emotions, and dilemmas which she cannot repudiate without interrupting her reading experience. Asibong notes that the way in which images are presented in film means that traumatising experiences are "impossible for the spectator to normalize or shelve" (2015, p. 90). Within the crucible of an immersive literary reading experience, so, too, I maintain, the manner in which unbearable events and emotions are portrayed in the context of the narrative means that the reader is compelled to face them, and those resonances from her own experience which they evoke. As the narrative weaves into a coherent whole the shards of human life, contextualised and somehow ennobled by their literary cocoon, so the reader is enabled to own and integrate elements of her own psychic experience which had been repressed. There is a quality in the type of attention given by a reader to her text, when she is fully immersed in it, that makes the difference, and this quality of engagement, seems in part to come about because the Other (the book) is a literary art form. To illustrate this literary quality, I quote one example from my reading journal:

> I am finding the narrative style of *Mary Barton* (Gaskell, 1848/2012) delightful and compelling. The story itself is one of poverty and deprivation, and the descriptions of the characters' lives very bleak. The writing, however, is so beautiful, as to make something aesthetically pleasing from scenarios of abject misery. The death of the mother of the eponymous heroine I found very moving in its simplicity, and poignancy. Her husband goes in search of the doctor: "Is she so very bad?" asked he. "Worse, much worser than I ever saw her before," replied John. No! she was not - she was at peace" (p. 19). A little later another death occurs, where, having already watched one of her little twin boys die for lack of nourishment and appropriate medical attention, the late Mrs Barton's friend, Mrs Wilson, is depicted sitting with the remaining twin in her arms, awaiting his inevitable demise. His final moments are simply recorded: "Nature's struggles were soon exhausted, and he breathed his little life away in peace" (p. 72).

I conclude that it is the literary quality of such passages that elevates the reader's experience and enables her to absorb the sad images. Whilst at the same time being

emotionally very moving, the beauty of the turns of phrase in Gaskell's writing offers the reader an aesthetic container, which makes the unbearable content bearable.

The question of aesthetic quality, and whether texts may be said to have inherent aesthetic quality *per se*, or only become so endowed when perceived aesthetically in the experience of the reader/audience/beholder, has been much debated (Pepper, 1949; Prall, 1936; Tilghman, 1966). Indeed, Tilghman (1966, p. 352) described aesthetic quality as: "... simply the emotional or feeling quality that we discover in a work of art when we attend to it aesthetically", his contention being that individuals approach works of art from an aesthetic position, and it is thence that they derive their aesthetic quality, it not being something which the art form intrinsically possesses independent of the reader/beholder.

I wish to link in here, also, the work of Louise Rosenblatt (1960, 1982, 1986, 1994, 1998). She draws a very helpful distinction between two attitudes to reading which may be adopted by a reader, namely ***efferent*** and ***aesthetic***. The former's nomenclature indicates that the purpose of the reading is to extract knowledge, the important element being what the reader takes from her reading back into her life, the term ***efferent*** being derived from the Latin verb meaning to carry off. "In aesthetic reading, in contrast, the reader's primary concern is with what happens ***during*** the actual reading event" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 24). While Rosenblatt is clear that reading happens on a continuum, and no reading is exclusively efferent or aesthetic, there is, she asserts, a noticeable distinction in intention/focus on the present moment, immersed in the actual process of reading itself, when reading aesthetically.

Into this debate I also bring the work of Roland Barthes (1975) and consider his discussion of ***texts of pleasure*** in contrast to ***texts of bliss*** (pp**.** 33-34). By assigning specific qualities to each of these taxonomic categories, he implies that a text, *per se*, possesses particular characteristics, and along these lines aesthetic

quality might be seen as one feature. The former classification (texts of pleasure), Barthes understands to be those novels which follow a classic structure of beginning, middle and end, usually told from the perspective of an omniscient, impersonal third person, that brings comfort to the reader by offering a stable, continuous narrative. In contrast to this, he defines texts of bliss as those which go beyond these parameters, unsettle the reader in their unconventionality, and so produce either a disturbed or ecstatic response. My purpose in alluding to this is not to enter into a discussion of differentiation between texts in order to capture the essence of Barthes' taxonomy, but merely to illustrate that it is possible to theorise about the nature and character of a text, as well as to think about the nature and character of the reader's relationship with a text.

Whether aesthetic quality pre-exists in the literary work, or is created at the point of the reader engaging with it is, in many ways, immaterial to my thesis, as the crucial point I am making here, is that there ***will be*** an aesthetic dimension to the relationship between reader and literary fiction, whatever its aetiology, and this is what affords the possibility of the reader being open to contemplate elements of previously unprocessed experience: because they are presented in an aesthetic environment. This is not to say that the reader is seduced by the presentation, but to recognise that being in a psychic state that is receptive to, and appreciative of, beautifully crafted literature, means the reader is in a more open, less defended mental state than she might ordinarily be, and is able to apply herself, psyche and mind, to engaging with the words on the page.

Along with Rosenblatt (1994), Asibong (2015) couches this in terms of a qualitatively different kind of attention. Writing of Sirk's (1959) film of Hurst's (1933/1990) novel, *The imitation of life*, he states: "I think that Sirk offered us something of a blueprint for a ***different kind of gazing experience***, one capable of transforming the unmetabolized affect of infantile disorientation into something potentially nurturing and generative of emotional thought" (Asibong, 2015, p. 95) (italics mine). It is the existence of this qualitatively different kind of gazing

[reading] experience that I believe is crucial to the endeavour. As I discuss in chapter five, this quality of gazing experience may need both an external context (devoid of impingements, and derived from the fact that reading fiction is a leisure pastime, and so approached in a relaxed frame of mind), and an internal state of mind (not preoccupied with other psychic concerns, and open to the Other non-defensively). Nevertheless, the experience of being immersed in the reading of literary fiction involves the reader in a deliberate, concentrated occupation with the story she is reading, where she can linger over the words, savour the atmospheric evocations, and so mentally lose herself within the narrative. It is not the kind of cursory gazing where her eyes flit across the page with the sole purpose of gleaning the salient elements of the evolving plotline alone. It is more than an academic or purely cognitive exercise. She is fully taken up and absorbed in it, her psychic gaze penetrating the nuances of the experiences of which she is reading and absorbing them into herself. Such concentration may be mirrored in the reading of a mathematical or reference text (where the reader's purpose is to understand concepts and facts), but not such emotional gazing. This is the province of psychotherapeutics, art, and religion, and is, I conclude, a key factor in what facilitates the generative and transformational potential of reading literary fiction.

The transpersonal dimension

Developing the concept of relating to a non-human subject opens up, in addition, possibilities that have to do with not being confined by human limitations, and my findings show that immersive literary reading offers opportunity for transpersonal connection. Through the laying aside of the ego that is prerequisite to the reader losing herself in her text and being taken out of her immediate individual daily concerns, I conclude she has the potential, through her reading, to unite with elements of humanity on a more global scale. I now consider this audacious claim.

Pioneer feminist theoretician Rosi Braidotti posits that: "a posthuman subject ... exceeds the boundaries of both anthropocentrism and of compensatory humanism, to acquire ***a planetary dimension***" (2013, p. 89) (italics mine). A

subjectivity (the text) that is not bound by being human, and transcends the limits of individual personal experience may, therefore, offer the reader, in relationship with it, the possibility of connecting to a greater, more universal reality than simply her own subjective life story. Classic fiction crosses the parameters of time and geography and retains a validity outside the context of its creation, being accessible to readers of subsequent generations and alternative locations and connecting with their shared experiences of humanity.

I share a powerful personal illustration of this phenomenon: as a child I remember seeing on my mother's bookshelves a very thick hard back tome entitled *Roland Yorke* (Wood, 1869/2018), beautifully bound with gold trimmed pages and I recall how my mother enjoyed reading this novel. At some point in the past I had read it, but my memory of it was very dim and I elected to re-read it during this research process. As I started to read, I felt an unexpected closeness to my mother (now dead over forty years), and it was as if her comforting presence accompanied me as I read, and we were for that short time companions in literature. I liken this to something reminiscent of the "communion of the saints," referred to in the Anglican catechism (Book of Common Prayer, 1662, p. 23), in the recognition of there being connection outside the confines of time, and even beyond the grave, between a human subject in relationship with a non-human subject (here, the book). Much as Christian saints across centuries engaging with the words of the liturgy and, as they do so, drawing on the tradition of their forefathers and all those who held the faith in past times, share an experience across time and even transcending death with those who have preceded them, so, I suggest, the readers of the canon of literature become part of a body of readership that transcends time and place, and by virtue of doing so, are connected in the unity of reading.

The paradox is such that, although immersive reading is a solitary activity, taking place in the privacy of the reader's psyche, picking up and engaging with a literary text that has stood the test of time and which has been enjoyed by countless other individuals before her, means that the reader joins the host of her

predecessors (alive or dead), and, by virtue of becoming part of a shared readership (albeit a collective made up of individuals), makes a transpersonal connection.

Bennett's character, Hector, in *The history boys* (2004) captures the essence of this idea in conversation with his pupils:

> The best moments in reading are when you come across something - a thought, a feeling, a way of looking at things - which you had thought special and particular to you. Now here it is, set down by someone else, a person you have never met, someone even who is long dead. And it is as if a hand has come out and taken yours (p. 56).

This, certainly, was my experience as I read *Resurrection* (Tolstoy, 1899/2014), cited earlier. It was as if Nekhlyudov held my hand and we shared the agony of the moment together. There is something profound in the realisation that I, as a reader, am connected to the whole of creation (Morton, 2010), and that it is possible to be in relationship with an Other that is not confined to the limitations of human subjecthood. Of key importance to this discussion is the fact that the intersubjectivity of which I write, i.e., that between the reader and the extended readership, is not a relationship between two single beings, but one being and a body of others. Put another way, the Other in this context, with whom the reader connects, is a collective, not an individual. The reader is, thus, engaging with humanity. Such a connection is both utterly, intensely personally subjective, and also transcends individual subjectivity to connect with the human condition, the human experience, etc., in a more global, oceanic way. This may be because the matrix through which this transformation/enlightenment occurs is not just a personal one. It is transpersonal.

Immersed in my novel, as I weep for Margaret whose bedside vigil ends when her mother dies (Gaskell, 1854-1855/1994) in *North and South*, or feel the horror of the finality of death when Dickens, in *The old curiosity shop*, repeats again and again the fact of little Nell's eventual end (1840-1841/2010, pp. 538-539), I am not only crying for the plight of the characters in the text, nor purely for my own

identification with the heartaches of watching a loved one die and feeling the pain of my own bereavements, but I am lamenting the human condition, the fact that we are mortal, that death and loss affect us all, and it is our lot in life to endure and accept them. This dialogue of mournings (Leader, 2008) transcends each separate experience of attachment and loss and connects us with the fact of being human. It is not, however, connection to an abstract concept of being human, but a deeply emotional relationship to our own humanity.

In this way, I conclude, immersive literary reading can also serve as a vehicle to connect the reader with aspects of her own humanity and being part of a species and a world where experiences of love and loss are the bedrock of our lives, that there exists a kind of collective intersubjectivity which embraces the essence of both the intense personal links and, at the same time, the more far-reaching global connections that may be experienced in this way through the process of successful immersive reading.

Conclusion

In this chapter I explore various elements of what I see as the intersubjective exchange between reader and text. I establish initially my finding that for there to be the possibility of a satisfactory reading experience, reader and text must be in a state of attunement, so that the reader feels a sense of resonance with what she reads, whether in relation to the writing style or language, the subject matter, her life experience or interests.

I then progress to consider the nature of the collaboration between the reading pair, and conclude that the reader has both an active and a passive stance in this, that she is neither simply introjecting information wholesale, nor creating entirely freestyle from her imagination, but responding to the promptings of the text and overlaying the narrative with her own interpretations and conceptions, such that the end product (which is, of course, ephemeral and occurs in her psyche in the moment of reading) is co-created. This process, I find, occurs through a type

of merger, where boundaries become blurred between the two subjectivities of reader and text.

I conclude that the relationship between reader and text may be seen as a reversal of normal object relations development, where a character from fiction progressively morphs in the imagination of the reader to become a subjective entity, unique to her own perception. This is contrary to the process of building awareness of the Other in normal life situations, which starts from being a bundle of projections in the mind of the subject and progresses to a position where the Other assumes her own identity as separate individual, available for relationship. Object relations theory, I note, starts from the position of the subject (and her relation to the object), and I discuss my thesis of how in the process of immersive literary reading, the reader may at times experience a sense of being the Other, where the text shines a light on personal aspects of the reader's life, sometimes with profound effects. I link this to Winnicott's (1963) theory of being found, recognising the therapeutic impact of feeling oneself so intimately known through the pages of the book.

Building on this, I then explore the facility for the reader to see herself as part of humankind in a way that transcends her individuality. The sense of being known in her innermost being enables her to recognise that her experience is both intensely personal but also common the world over, and, in owning this, she can sense her part in a much more global community. I raise the issue of the awe-inspiring question of synchronicity, how, inexplicably, it can be a reader's experience to read something that is of the essence of her circumstances at the time of reading that makes it pertinent and poignant, with no adequate explanation as to how such synchronous occurrences happen. That this remains a mystery I also see as part of the richness of the reader's experience, and making the link here with Benjamin's (2005b) thinking about connecting with the "Big Energy" as a significant moment in the development of this thesis.

I then move on to draw attention to the idea of a communion of readership across ages and cultures, and in particular, of the incidence of belonging to a worldwide readership of a specific piece of fiction. That all this is facilitated through the auspices of a non-human Other (the text) I recognise as a key factor in the containment function that literature fulfils, discussing how I see the text as a literary container (Bion, 1962), able to hold and express the ineffable, unendurable aspects of human existence, and present them to the reader in such a way as to make them bearable, not just putting words round them, but beautiful, aesthetically pleasing words that contribute to the joy of reading.

Chapter seven: Reading as transformation

In this chapter, I develop my thesis that the immersive reading of literary fiction can be a potentially transformational experience, based on analysis of data from my own reading journals and reflections on my own reading experience. I build chiefly on the writings of Christopher Bollas, a contemporary psychoanalytic theorist of the independent British school, in particular consideration of what he terms the "transformational object" (1987, pp. 13-29). This concept refers to the experience of the individual who pursues an Other (person/experience/activity) in order to surrender to it, and be transformed by it, mirroring the early experience of a benign maternal presence, through the matrix of which the infant is changed. I find that there are similar resonances for the reader, where the ***experience of reading literary fiction*** might be deemed the Other for those occasions where, in surrendering the self to the process of reading to the point of losing herself and merging with the experience (as explored in chapter four), the reader may be transformed.

I conclude that it is important that the reader be enchanted by the text, in order to sustain the necessary level of surrender to remain immersed in it, and, drawing on the work of Roland Barthes (1975), explore sexual metaphors of desire, arousal and seduction and their parallels in the reading process. Finally, as a crucial coda to the transformational process, I recognise the need for the reader to adopt a reflexive position vis-à-vis what she has read (whether through finding a space of contemplation, or through journalling) in order to identify what has changed.

In line with the principles of heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990, Sultan, 2019), which draws on the researcher's personal knowledge and relationship with the phenomenon in question, I illustrate these elements of my thesis with data collected from the primary data of my personal reading journals. These highlight, *inter alia*, occasions where I have both failed to let go as a reader, and so stunted the transformational potential of the experience, and also where I have had personal life-changing epiphanies in the process of literary reading (when I ***have*** been able to let go in the Milnerian sense, as discussed in chapter four). As I have reflected on

these former experiences, I am aware that the territory into which the subject matter might have led me felt too immediate, too current, too intimate. I wanted to retain an element of control over the issues that I might have had to face, had I allowed my novel to lead me into the murky depths of my own uncensored psyche at those points. I mobilised ego defences, and I was aware of reading more superficially, engaging at a cognitive level with the narrative of the lives of others (still enjoying the intrigue of the process), but holding back in terms of free emotional engagement, and thus precluding the possibility of personal transformation.

I start with a vignette from my own reading experience which illustrates a point of psychic stagnation at a time when the opportunity presented itself to me for deeper personal insight and potential transformation. On this occasion, I did not allow myself to venture into it, but tenaciously defended myself against it. I was reading *The house of mirth* by Edith Wharton (1905/1997), one of my favourite authors, and, in earlier journal entries relating to this book, had described myself as "captivated", "enchanted", and the book as being "gripping" and "hard to put down", but I realised that my journal was not taking me into exploring in any depths the parallels with my own life situation (which were plentiful), but remained more connected with details of the plot or the author's language. The most telling journal entry I wrote, started to explore my reticence to journal:

> I note that, although I loved *The house of mirth*, I have struggled to engage in journalling about it. I think this is partly because what it brings up for me is emotionally too difficult and for confidentiality reasons I do not want to commit to paper some of the thoughts/feelings stirred in me. There are many resonances, but uncomfortable ones. I feel therefore slightly disconnected from it and am aware that I kept my distance. … I failed to let go in my reading on this occasion, even though partly I wanted to… I am left feeling slightly unsatisfied with this read.

I write my journal in oblique, abstract terms, without clearly stating what it is I am avoiding contemplating as I read. This serves to distance me from the experience, offering perhaps an illusion that I am engaging with the material, as I am aware of my evasion, but refusing to entertain the life-giving possibility of greater self-knowledge. Similarly, my comment about refraining from in-depth exploration of

my experience for reasons of confidentiality really is something of a defence, as the individual whom the writing might concern is now overseas and would be unlikely to read my comments in any case. I think more saliently, I was simply avoiding having to face some of the uncomfortable truths that were being highlighted to me about how I handle intimacy and my reluctance to commit in relationships, as well as the thorny decision of whether to marry for financial security rather than love, which was also faced by Lily Bart, the novel's heroine. Even as I write about this process now, I feel a strong disappointment with myself, knowing that I evaded the opportunity Wharton's writing afforded me at this point of reading, of delving into my own psychic processes in a potentially transformative way.

It is the last sentence of that journal entry which I believe is the most significant in terms of understanding these processes under discussion: "I am left feeling slightly unsatisfied with this read". The dissatisfaction was not a failure on the part of the text, but due to the fact that I, the reader, deliberately held back from emotionally engaging and repudiated a chance to know myself better, and the possible life-changing consequences of that self-knowledge. My state of being with regard to my position vis-à-vis the potential relationship opportunity I was facing remained static, as I resisted letting go and opening myself up in more than a very controlled way. The outcome of this refusal was dissatisfaction with that experience of reading because I knew I could have gone deeper.

Reading as a generative process

My thesis is that literary reading can be a generative, transformational process ***if*** the reader can sufficiently allow herself to let go of the psychic restraints of normal life, divest herself of customary ego defence mechanisms and regress into a childlike mental state where merger with the Other is possible. In other contexts, this state would be viewed as madness, but in the case of successful, immersive literary reading, I find it *sine qua non*. This is discussed at length in chapter four. I conclude that, at the point of letting go and merger with the Other, the reader's reveries couple and blur with the fiction, such that specific memories are hypercathected

within the containing environment of the presenting storyline, which matrix facilitates the possibility of personal transformation.

To understand the nature of the metamorphosis which can occur within the reader in the process of reading literary fiction, I turn initially to the seminal work of Christopher Bollas (1987). Developing Winnicott's (1963a) concept of the environment mother, Bollas states that "mother is less significant and identifiable as an object than as a process that is identified with cumulative internal and external transformations" (1987, p. 14). I apply this thinking to the reading of literary fiction, by which I mean that it is not the novel, itself, which is the object to be sought after, but the ***process of immersive reading***. The reader surrenders not to the text, but to the reading experience. It is this latter which has within it the potential to transform. When I say I love the writings of Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, or Mary Elizabeth Braddon, for example, what I really mean is I love the experience of immersing myself in the stories these authors tell (and allowing myself to be drawn in to them because I enjoy their particular story-telling style), and I love the impact on me, as a reader, of giving myself over to them. As I allow my imagination to transport me to the scenarios described, I make links to memories of events in my own biography, and re-experience the thoughts, feelings and sensations which were evoked at the time. I do this, however, within the context of a contained fictional environment, which transcends time and location, and so enables me to experience a level of cathexis which would not ordinarily be possible in a real-world situation (as, in a similar vein, the transferences experienced within a psychotherapeutic setting may facilitate change). My conclusion is that it is the ***matrix of the reading experience*** which makes possible the capacity for lasting personal transformation, not simply the individual memories evoked, or scenarios imagined, although these might serve as the vehicle through which the process occurs. The replication of the experience of being merged with the text and the memories in this way re-enacts the primal scene of merger with the maternal presence, and effects the transformational process (Bollas, 1987).

Although I may feel a thrill at being in a library, surrounded, floor to ceiling with books, unless I select a specific tome, take it down from the shelf and engage in the process of reading it, psychically it has little benefit to me. "... The quest is not to possess the object; rather the object is pursued in order to surrender to it as a medium that alters the self" (Bollas, 1987, p. 14). The library may be enjoyed for what it symbolises (reminders of absorbing oneself in the reading process), but it is this latter wherein lies the potential for transformation. I conclude that the act of immersive literary reading itself evokes a primitive memory of engaging in a similar, undifferentiated way with the maternal object (of itself a life-altering process), as well as serving to elicit evocations of, and identifications with, specific later life experiences and re-cathecting them in the light of the reader's present situation.

I am interested to recognise that these ideas are complemented by the empirical research of Olivia Sagan (2011, 2012, 2014, 2015a, 2015b, 2018, 2020), who puts forward a compelling case for the therapeutic properties of the aesthetic, showing how, even when working with patients diagnosed with Dissociative Identity Disorder (2018) (and, therefore, generally resistant to traditional talking therapies), significant therapeutic benefits can be identified through the healing power of what she terms “art-making” (p. 25). Artwork, she finds, not only connects the patient with dissociated parts of the self, but also provides a matrix in which cognitive restructuring may take place. It is this aesthetic connection which I conclude is also the therapeutic basis of immersive literary reading, where the reader is taken out of herself and presented with an alternative environment in which to consider cut off or denied parts of herself and her experience. That which conventional psychotherapy confronts head-on (and therefore meets layers of defences and resistance to be worked through), is accessed through an aesthetic medium with potentially generative results.

Personal examples of transformational reading

Drawing on my own reading journals, I now explore reading experiences that have been personally transformational for me. There are many instances I could cite, but I limit myself to two examples, both from the short stories of Katherine Mansfield (1908-1923/2006). The first of these is *Bliss* (1920/2006b), which I describe in my journal as "a very powerful read that has stayed with me for many days". My journal details a vignette where Bertha, a young housewife is seen, in advance of the return from work of Harry, her husband, making elaborate preparations for a dinner party, and taking delight in ensuring the rooms are laid out properly with appropriate adornments and flower arrangements, etc. It is not until the very end of the evening (and the end of the novel), when the last of the visitors are going home, that Bertha discovers her husband's infidelity, through witnessing an indiscretion with one of the dinner guests. I note in my journal having read this the sense of "an energy within me [that is] stirred by this novella", and that "although the feelings evinced are unpalatable, something is alive, the sensations are energetic, even though the urge is to vomit (and go against the natural flow)". My journal entry reads:

> I have just finished *Bliss* (Mansfield, 1920/2006b) and am gripped by it retrospectively. The dénouement is shocking and totally unexpected, and there in the pit of my stomach I am aware of the sick feeling of discovering an infidelity.

As I read of Bertha's discovery, I remembered so clearly being in my bedroom and receiving a phone call which alerted me to my own husband's unfaithfulness, equally as unforeseen as the discovery in the story. I felt a nauseous feeling in my stomach and a sense of shock and horror which accompanied it. My journal continues:

> Bertha Young's response to this was totally unfamiliar to me: "But the pear tree was as lovely as ever and as full of flower and as still" (p. 80). To be able to have that long perspective at a time when I felt that my whole world had imploded is both unthinkable and enviable. Bertha did not know what was going to happen but retreated into the knowledge that the trees were just the same. Nothing had changed that - the bigger view. Life was not just her little world, her little marriage, her little house, trees were timeless, life went on. I re-read the story twice.

Bertha's reaction I found curious and yet liberating, and, many years on from a similar experience of my own, I can identify more with it than I ever dreamed were possible. The cynic might construe a "life goes on" response as defensive and platitudinous (as, indeed, it might be), but I found something deeper in here, which touched me at a more profound level: the awareness of the continuity of life, the connection of all things and the smallness of an individual's tragedies in the context of the universal. I still felt my churning stomach, as that sick realisation dawned, but there was something else, something greater this time, which for me was transformational in my understanding of my own experience, and my capacity to be resilient and move on with life. It brought a larger perspective, connected me with what Benjamin describes as the Big Energy (2005b, p. 187), a consciousness of something much greater than the self that persisted and was unchanged in the face of the vicissitudes and upsets of my personal life. In order for this to occur, I believe I had to be open to a paradigm shift in my understanding and not narcissistically vested in retaining a position of victimhood, in order to engage with the transformational potential of my reading experience.

In the course of engaging with this novella, I abdicated my right of detachment and allowed myself to merge with the scenario unfolding before me on the page in my imagination. As Bertha's experience melded with my own memories and evocations, I had a visceral response, and it was as a result of allowing it to touch me so deeply that I was able to effect a sort of decathexis of emotional energy from my erstwhile tightly held tragic appraisal of the situation. I was able to cede my belief, carefully cherished over many years, that I was the victim of a betrayal that would for ever mar my life and chances of happiness. In relinquishing this position, I believe I was opened up to re-appraising my situation and engaging with a bigger picture of life. That the pear tree symbolised stability, and a longevity exceeding my own brief life cycle brought comfort and a new perspective, and I was changed because of it. It could be argued that my capacity to view the situation in this way was due to having spent several years engaged in personal therapy, and certainly I am not minimising the importance of this, but a

new realisation dawned at a more profound emotional level as I contemplated Mansfield's story, which I believe exemplifies at an experiential level the possibility of transformation through immersive literary reading. It is interesting to note, in observing the phenomenology of my experience, that at the point of reading I still felt real emotions, as evidenced by my churning stomach, and it was only as I pondered what I had read and reflected on it in the light of my own experience, that enlightenment, serenity and liberation came.

My second example of transformation through reading the works of Katherine Mansfield (1908-1923/2006) relates to a story called *The stranger* (1922/2006y). The central protagonist is a Mr John Hammond, to whom the reader is first introduced as he waits expectantly on the quayside for the arrival of his wife from a sea voyage. Disembarkation seems to take an eternity, as Mr Hammond's impatience becomes ever more evident in his resented exchanges with officials and others in the crowd attending their loved ones. Finally, his wife is spotted, making her farewells to several of the other passengers, and even once she has appeared and greeted him, she swiftly announces she must return to the ship to take her leave of the doctor. Finally, she extricates herself and the couple make their way to their hotel, where the patient husband has organised the best room available in an endeavour to create the perfect reunion. My journal continues the narrative and my response:

> I am spellbound, identifying so strongly with Mr Hammond, awaiting his wife's return, and she, once disembarked from the ship, stopping at every turn to say goodbye to all and sundry. Memories stirred of father as a child and feeling we always had to wait until the very last minute, until after he had spoken to everyone else before we could get away.

As I immerse myself in John Hammond's story, I am transported to childhood memories after church on a Sunday, having to wait until the bitter end, when father had had conversations with first one and then another adult, said goodbye to everyone, and then locked up behind us, before we could all go home. And then later, in a couple relationship excitedly going to meet my husband from the airport

on his return from an overseas trip, only to find him emerging with a business companion with whom I would be obliged to engage prior to being able to drive home on our own. There was always the sense that the other (whether my father or my husband) prioritised other people over me, and that a reunion or the prospect of an intimate shared journey between just the two of us carried greater significance for me than him. Merging with Mr Hammond in Mansfield's (1922/2006y) tale, I felt his anticipation and disappointment as keenly as if it were my own and embraced the feeling of wretchedness it evoked.

When the couple finally attain their hotel room, Mrs Hammond (Janey) announces that the delay in disembarking was because one of the passengers on the ship had died. There follows a short conversation about this, which culminates in Janey's throwaway comment: "He died in my arms" (p. 293). Suddenly everything changes and John's feelings of Oedipal rivalry assume a new and disturbing intensity, and I felt shock as I read it.

The novella ends with the words: "They would never be alone together again" (p. 294) which conveys a sense of something having been irretrievably spoilt forever, a Paradise (or illusion of Paradise) lost, never to be regained. Such was my experience on a trip to the fairytale island of Bali with my ex-husband, whence my reverie took me as I read this story. It had been intended as a second honeymoon, an attempt to start again in our relationship after the resolution of infidelity. The reality was that the reconciliation was short-lived, trust having been irrevocably broken, and the marriage foundered. Again, I felt deeply that sense of being the one not-preferred, the other being chosen in precedence over me.

As I continued to let the ripples of *The stranger* (Mansfield, 1922/2006y) wash over me, and I meditated upon the scenarios portrayed, there dawned a new awareness: John Hammond's efforts to create a perfect reunion and the depth of his hurt over his wife's revelation of the dying man were extreme and unrealistic responses. Nothing was explicitly avowed in terms of any infidelity on her part,

and it appeared to me that he was projecting a great deal of his own insecurities onto the situation. He did not clarify things with his wife but continued on the supposition that his perspective was the correct one. Was he making a mountain out of a molehill? Was he prejudicing his own future happiness by adopting this attitude? Was this what I had done in over-exaggerating both my lack of worth to others and my expectations of them?

I attribute the transformation that occurred for me in reading this short story to the process I am propounding of abandoning myself to the text, allowing myself to connect with the raw emotions that were evoked in merging with Mr Hammond, then stepping back and reflecting upon what had been shown to me in my reading, and from that reappraising my position. As I revisited childhood scenarios, re-experienced in adult relationships, I was able to decathect my investment in the underdog position that had been my experience in many intimate relationships (and which I had cherished and rehearsed) and I found a measure of healing that may not have been possible in another context.

Having provided first-hand examples of it, I now proceed to tease out a little further what I see as the essential elements in this transformational process of immersive reading, and then discuss each in more depth. In the first place, I conclude, there needs to be, within the psyche of the reader, a melding together of the two worlds of the fiction being read and the reader's own life, such that the boundaries become blurred into merger, and the ego is dissolved. This process can only happen, as seen in chapter four, when the reader is able to let go and let her imagination/reverie take her where it will without censorship/agenda or seeking to control, and where she is not invested in a narcissistic, egoic position. Reading in this undefended state means the reader also allows herself to be known, or ***read***, as she reads, and I see this as a key factor in facilitating the possibility of transformation. Seeing herself reflected back to her in the pages of her novel, permits the reader to acknowledge those secret areas of her life of which she might be ashamed or at least seek to hide from public view. They are then available for

further scrutiny and reflection. Next, I find the necessity of the reader's emotional engagement with the events and memories evoked, to the point of effecting a cathexis. This, I suggest, is dependent upon the reader being sufficiently enchanted by that which she is reading to engage, not just at the level of cognitive curiosity, but at an emotional level, where a feeling response to what she reads is evoked. This also facilitates the necessary regression by taking over her imagination. This state of what I am terming ***enchantment*** needs to be sustained throughout the literary experience. The final part of the process of transformation through immersive reading comes from the reader's retrospective reflection on her experience and extrapolation of a conscious understanding of the impact it has had, so that transformations that have occurred at an unconscious level may be articulated and consolidated. I elaborate on this a little later in this chapter.

Merger

The first part of this process, then, is merger: the fusion of two worlds within the psyche of the reader. The matrix of being immersed in the reading experience, I conclude, is the crucial medium which facilitates transformation. Just as Bollas (1987, p. 14) sees "... the mother [as] less significant and identifiable as an object than as a ***process*** [italics mine] that is identified with cumulative internal and external transformations", so the reader's ***state of being merged*** emotionally and psychically with the experience of reading is the morphogenetic element in the process. Although the object itself is of significance (as discussed in chapter six) and not just any indiscriminate book can produce the sought-after effect, there needing to be some resonance and appreciation in the reader for the individual literary style and story told, in order to engage at a deep level, it is, I find, the ***process of engagement*** itself that holds the key to transformation. This merger replicates the undifferentiated state of mother and infant, and, importantly, enables the reader to loosen her attachment to her own ego and be psychically available to the process. I explore this issue of letting go and merger in some depth in chapter four, so merely signpost it here. From this undefended state of union with the text, I find a

comfortable inattention to awareness of the self in an egoic sense is balanced with the reader's openness to self-knowledge.

Being known/read

For the infant, Bollas (1987) claims, knowledge comes about existentially through experience of the presence of the maternal caregiver, and the dawning recognition of changes within the self, as a result of being in relationship with her. The neonate may be distressed by being wet, hungry, cold, feeling fragmented, etc., but the ministering presence of an attuned mother figure can transform those sensations very quickly. Having needs met adequately in this way for the baby translates into a reassuring sense of being known, or being ***read***, by an Other. I have found that there exists a complementary phenomenon in the successful experience of the reader, who may find herself identified, or known, through the pages of literary fiction. Her innermost thoughts and feelings may be presented to her in the guise of the characters in her novel, but her sense is of being known - or perhaps more importantly, of being ***read*** - and this has the potential to become a personally transformative experience. Finding herself so intimately known as the reader might do in the pages of her book develops trust, and enables her to surrender to the experience, at which point, she is opening herself up to the possibility of psychic change. Psychic transformation does not always accompany reading in this way, but, by virtue of being in this merged, undefended state, the stage is set for it to occur. Being known in this way can also be therapeutic of itself, even if it does not lead to psychic change, as it may bring (non-transformational) insights to the reader, or uncover what Bollas referred to in his early work as the "unthought known" (1987, p. 3). Finding herself revealed in the pages of her novel may be described as putting words around that which previously was only tacitly known and making it accessible to her to think about it (Bollas, 2013, 2015).

I illustrate this point with a couple of examples from my own reading experiences. A surprising vignette from *Veronika decides to die* (Coelho, 2000) had a

profound impact upon me, and serves as a graphic case of finding myself feeling exposed through reading. My reading journal elaborates:

> I was shocked by my response yesterday to a particular fragment: Veronika had struck up a conversation with one of the other women in the asylum, who recounted to her the story of her aunt, who had recently committed suicide. She was described as a fearful, passive woman, who remained housebound from anxiety. The only time in her life when she exhibited other behaviour was when her husband took a lover, and she threw tantrums, shouting and screaming and breaking things. "Absurd though it may seem, I think that was the happiest time of her life" (Coelho, 2000, p. 12), Veronika's companion informed her. I was shocked at this statement, but more by the epiphany moment it generated in me. In many ways, the aftermath of my marriage break up was the happiest time in my life - in all the agony of soul I experienced, I was at least alive in a way that I hadn't been throughout the course of the marriage and probably thereafter either. I knew what this statement meant, and it felt profound.

It was a breath-taking moment, as if a light had been shined on my innermost secret self. My feelings had been revealed; my thought processes exposed. Those emotions and sensations that I had not dared to articulate to anyone were staring me in the face on the pages of my book. I was known. I had been ***read***. Perhaps more accurately: I had been exposed.

My second example is of another equally surprising, though less painful, insight which was derived from my reading of Vickers's (2012) novel, *The cleaner of Chartres*, which I found delightful and compelling. As might be inferred from the title, the central protagonist is a woman (called Agnès) who takes a job as a cleaner of the eponymous cathedral. I wrote of the novel:

> It bewitched me. I loved the ambience of Chartres cathedral, felt myself there within its sacred, awesome space, and shared Agnès's love of it, she finding it a haven. When she went there to die, I thought that I, too, would like to die in a cathedral. I would feel safe, protected, and connected to that great line of saints who had gone before me.

Not considering myself an overly religious person (though I do hold a private faith), this insight surprised me greatly, but it was a spontaneous thought, arising from my experience of having been totally absorbed in the reading of this novel, and it has

shown me something about myself that I had not found accessible via other means: how much the tradition of the faith of my forefathers means to me, as a secure base, a safe foundation. It was only as I merged with Agnès through my immersive reading experience, that I discovered this facet of myself of which I had previously been unaware. The realisation generated within me a supreme sense of wellbeing, and of being known in a way that was above and beyond normal ways of knowing. I was partly able to access this knowledge as I was drawn in by Vickers's evocative descriptions of the Gothic cathedral, such that I could place myself within the walls of the magnificent twelfth century edifice, and sense the containment of its strong tradition, symbolised by the permanence of its structure. Whilst these insights are not transformational in that they have not changed my perspective, they consolidate awareness of the unthought known (Bollas, 1987), making conscious a personal truth that has been previously repressed, and with this a recognition of being deeply understood.

Enchantment

This point leads me to the next element of my thesis noted above: namely, that, in order for the reader to sustain the level of emotional engagement necessary be drawn into this mysterious place where worlds collide and fiction merges with autobiography in such a way to facilitate the revelation of tacit personal truths and transformational experiences, she needs to be induced, or, perhaps more accurately, seduced to do so. I discuss a little later the sexual metaphor that emerged as I sought to put words round the experience of being drawn in to read a novel. My conclusion is that the words on the page must be suitably enchanting and evocative to entice the reader into this undefended mental state. As I have previously noted (chapter two), the relationship between reader and narrative is symbiotic, and where the narrative fails sufficiently to captivate the reader, the requisite level of emotional engagement is absent, the spell is broken, and transformational potential is precluded. For the reader to be allured, I conclude, therefore, there needs to be a degree of attunement between her and the writing (as discussed in chapter five). This does not have to mean there need to be obvious similarities in the subject

matter of the novel and the reader's life story (though this may be the case), but the style of writing must evoke something in the reader to entice her to read on, and to abandon herself to it in such a way that deep cathexis can occur.

The psychic space occupied by the reader of literary fiction is, I conclude, an elusive, mysterious domain. The entire process of successful immersive reading is predicated upon the reader immersing herself in the intangible world of the imaginary, an ephemeral, mystical realm. Pursuit of the elusive is part of the appeal (James, 1902, as cited in March, 1941; Savage, 1964), and the fact that the experience cannot be boxed, or archived on a computer, but can only be practised transiently, in the moment, contributes to its general attraction for those who engage in the pursuit. The point I am making goes a step further than recognising that, in general, a level of enchantment is present in any reading of literary fiction (due to this elusive quality of the experience), to consider that, for the pastime to be enjoyed, each reader of each novel, each time she reads, needs continuously to be sufficiently enticed to continue reading. I discuss in chapter five the necessary conditions (both interpersonal and intrapsychic) which I found need to pertain in order to create a facilitating environment for the successful immersive literary reader: the absence of external impingements, and a comfortable inattention to the Other, as well as possession of a quiet, undefended mind. The absence of these distractions needs, equally, I discovered, to be complemented by the presence of an active sense of enchantment to propel into that which is being read. The reader has to be seduced into continuing her journey into the mystical sphere of her imaginings, in order to engage with the elusive alternative reality of the world of her fiction. Alain-Fournier (n.d., as cited in March, 1941, p. 266) describes this mysterious phenomenon in a letter to his friend, Jacques Rivière: "Je ne trouverai pas ... sur le paysage actuel des mots qui suggèrent le mystère, je *décrirai l'autre paysage* mystérieux ... Je pose, de façon très mystique peut-être, que le paysage à substituer, existe, qu'il faut *l'atteindre*, pour le *décrire*"[59]. The space occupied by the

[59] I will never find, in real life, words which suggest such mystery. I describe the mystery of another country altogether ... I claim, though it sounds perhaps rather mystical, that this other country exists, but you have to experience it before you can describe it.

reader is mysterious and elusive, in many ways defying concrete description, such that the only way really to understand it is to experience it.

It is about the experience in the moment. To inhabit, albeit temporarily, this other country, the reader is lured in, and needs to be continuously enticed to pursue her journey. This phenomenon is described in my portal novel, *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971). The scene is set by the metaphor of the shrouding of the mist that descends around him, as Augustin loses his way. The dreamlike state of the surreal prevails as he finds his way to the old chateau where the characters appear in fancy dress, and so the environment is created in which he sees and falls in love with Yvonne. When the carnival is over and he has to return to his everyday life, he has been bewitched by his experiences in the *domaine mystérieux* to such an extent that it becomes his singular quest to find his way back and recreate the experience, which is ephemeral, and so it is an impossible task. The experience can neither be grasped nor re-created, as each reading is unique and transient.

My point here is to indicate that enchantment with a text is not a once-for-all occurrence, but rather is present, continuous, and needs to be perpetuated throughout the whole reading experience. It behoves the reader, as far as is within her agency, to approach the occupation in an unencumbered frame of mind, ready to let go and abandon herself to it, but it also requires a level of attunement between reader and text, and the text must attract the reader in, and sustain her curiosity and enchantment throughout.

To explore this phenomenon further, I now consider my own experience, as evidenced by my reading journals, of occasions where I have been fascinated by my novel and allowed myself to be seduced into a deeply immersed experience of reading, and instances where the opposite has been true, and I have not been enticed to that deeper, more mystical level of engagement. I was interested to note that, of the dozens of novels I had read whilst engaged in this research, I had explicitly referenced this theme of enchantment in my journal commentary in

relation to 17 of them, and reported finding myself enchanted by ten, and distinctly not enchanted by seven. Finding such a pervasive negative reading experience for one who purports to be an avid reader was a surprise! It is to this phenomenon that I now turn.

Studying my journal entries around those reading experiences which I had found so unsatisfactory, I found a theme emerging, of having initially been seduced or drawn in, in some way, but that my sense of enchantment had not been sustained, and I had lost faith or interest in the process, and, on several occasions, came away with a sense of having been exploited by the author: what had entranced me to begin with felt like a ruse to get my attention and there then followed a political agenda, or some literary device that appeared to indulge the author rather than engage me as reader.

My task in this thesis is not to undertake literary criticism of the works of fiction which I have read in the course of carrying out my data collection, focused as I am on extrapolating the processes involved in a successful experience of reading of literary fiction. Understanding, however, in general terms, what it was that hampered my in-depth engagement with the novels I read, is a crucial part of comprehending the process, and so these experiences do bear exploration. I am aware that the factors that irked me and precluded my abandoning myself to my novel may not have had the same impact on another reader, so the reasons themselves are of less importance than the fact that my reading experience lacked the requisite sense of enchantment to make it successful, but some discussion of these elements may shed light on the process. I now consider the data I have collected from my journalling in relation to (lack of) enchantment as a factor in my reading of the novels alluded to above.

There are cases where I have written comments such as "the writing style does not appeal to me" and "I find myself somewhat unenchanted and bored by the narrative". These both relate to *Beloved* (Morrison, 1987/2004), but could equally

well have described many other highly acclaimed novels which have been recommended to me where I feel a similar response. Clearly this is a subjective response and relates more to my taste than any problem with the novel itself, as others before me have enjoyed the texts. It relates to the phenomenon I discuss in chapter five of the importance of ***attunement*** in the reading pair. Of greater interest, however, are other occasions, where my journalling describes ambivalence: "The experience was at one and the same time compelling and tedious. My curiosity was piqued ... but I became bored by event after event … and as a reader I felt angry". This was in relation to Fowles's (1965/1997) novel, *The magus*, and on this occasion, I did persevere to the end of the text, whereas with *Beloved*, I gave up halfway through.

That this theme of feeling angry/manipulated is echoed in relation to other reading experiences is pertinent to the discussion of enchantment being unsustained, and the absence of emotional cathexis and bears further scrutiny. I write of Calvino's (1980/1998) *If on a winter's night a traveller*: "I felt toyed with …It seemed to me that the good faith and anticipation with which I embarked upon the venture had been abused. I had been aroused, but then left high and dry…". In a similar vein, in relation to *Dora: A headcase* (Yuknavitch, 2012), my journal records "…I shut my heart, feeling somewhat patronised, intruded upon, manipulated, toyed with, disrespected, and treated like an object". Finally, of two of Ferrante's novels (2012, 2015), I write: "I had a sense of having been seduced into a state of expectancy and inquisitiveness …that turned into nothing". Reviewing these comments and thinking about my reading experiences of these novels, it is quite striking how sexually evocative my language is. The idea of being "toyed with", "aroused", "seduced", "abused", "left high and dry" conveys a frustration of having been excited and then let down. The foreplay was evident, and I allowed myself to be lured in, but my excitation was not gratified, and I left the experience frustrated and unconsummated. As a reader, my sense is that I had sought to fulfil my side of the relationship with the text, but the text had not delivered the expected satisfaction (Brooks, 1994).

As previously noted, my intention is not to critique the novels that I failed to attune to, nor consider why I might have been unreceptive to them at the point of reading (though there may be a plethora of reasons for this), but simply to recognise that, because, for whatever reason, I was not able to sustain a sense of enchantment, the reading experience failed to gratify. I argue that, in order for there to be the possibility of personal transformation when reading literary fiction, the reader needs to be cognitively and emotionally engaged, sufficiently titillated to pursue the occupation to its orgastic conclusion. To continue the sexual metaphor, the foreplay of the text needs to follow through, to penetrate the reader to the point of satisfaction. I discuss earlier in the chapter the phenomenon of the reader being ***known*** in the process of engaging with a novel, and this terminology also echoes the Biblical connotations of sexual relations.

Legitimate seduction is, it appears, a key part of a satisfying reading experience, but the seduction needs to be sustained and followed through. Roland Barthes (1975, p. 10) writes of "… the most erotic portion of the body *where the garment gapes*" as a metaphor for the reading process, where the allure of (mental and emotional) titillation is an important part of what keeps the reader reading. What is hinted at, or a brief glimpse of something attractive or satisfying, provides the reader with an incentive to press on towards the prize.

This seduction, I propound, needs to be both cognitive and emotional: cognitive in the sense that the reader's curiosity is continually piqued, such that the epistemic impulse is stimulated and the desire to find out what happens propels her forward, and emotional by way of her experiencing a feeling connection to the text or some of the characters portrayed within it. Without the engagement of her affect, the reading becomes an efferent (Rosenblatt, 1994) exercise, for the purpose solely of obtaining information, leaving the reader untouched. I explore in chapter six the distinction between efferent and aesthetic reading being largely in their respective teleologies (the former in order to elicit information, the latter for the purpose of pleasure). It is this aesthetic attitude that needs to be sustained in attracting the

reader to the text. As I have also discussed in chapter six, Knights (1995) points out that the language of literary reading is odd. It is not colloquial or mundane (even if the subject matter may be) but set apart and unique to the discipline. This is part of what enchants and is, as I have shown, also a factor involved in stimulating the reader's appetite to read and facilitating cathexis. Literary theorist and psychoanalyst Murray Schwartz refers to the immersive reader finding a "deep rapport" with this alternative space or "narrative holding environment" (Schwartz, 1988, p. 263), and it is this emotional engagement with the literary frame that I see as a key component of enchantment, the sustaining of which is instrumental in providing the potential for transformation. I also explore in chapter eight the part played by ***psychic intensities*** and ***screen evocations*** (Freud, 1899, 1900; Bollas, 1989, 1995) in keeping the reader captivated by the narrative.

Reflexion

The final element which I identified in the process of transformation is retrospective reflection on the experience in order to recognise, acknowledge and consolidate what has happened in the psyche. Reflection, I conclude, is not simultaneous to the reading process but sequential to it (Rennie, 2004), because at the point of reading the reader is immersed and merged with her text, participating in the moment, and in an undifferentiated state. Reflexivity suggests an implicit dualism because the ***I*** who thinks about herself reflexively is separate from the ***I*** who is caught up in the moment. There needs, therefore, to be opportunity to pause and allow the reflexive ***I*** to review the experience in order to consolidate any transformation that may have occurred, which remains unconscious or "unthought" (Bollas, 1987) until translated into words. Bollas (2013) writes of his own writing experience as a way to substantiate those thoughts which he has previously noted, but not fully articulated. They materialise at the point of being written and are also then available to communicate.

Returning to the examples I cited earlier of my own transformational reading experience, this is exactly the process which I identified. On my first

reading of *Bliss* (Mansfield, 1920/2006b), initially I felt shock and disbelief at Bertha's observation of the pear tree still being as lovely as it was before her discovery of her husband's infidelity. I believe some transformation had happened to me at that point (of which I was still unconscious) because I found the comment compelling and it led me to re-read the story. Had there been no psychic stirring within me, I think I would have thought it a moving vignette, felt sad, and moved on, possibly even dismissing the comment as a defensive rationalisation so that I could retain my own victim position. I did not do that. What I did do after the second reading, was contemplate and reflect upon what I had read, and journal about it. I knew it had had a significant impact on me and wanted to think more deeply about what that was, and what had changed. It was during this reflexive exercise, as I opened myself up to contemplate the "pear tree [being] as lovely as ever" (Mansfield, 1920/2006b, p. 80), that I identified the powerful healing insight which I describe earlier, of being able to let go of an entrenched belief that my situation was inherently tragic and forever fated to be so, and reconfigure it in the light of seeing myself and my life in the paradigm of a new, bigger perspective.

A similar process occurred for me also on reading *The stranger* (Mansfield, 1922/2006y). My initial response was to identify with Mr Hammond and share his hurt and his belief in the fact that nothing could ever be the same between his wife and himself, having discovered her dealings with the moribund stranger. Again, I believe something transformational had already occurred within me, which made me stop and reflect on what I had read (recognising it to be noteworthy), but it was only as I meditated on it, and wrote my journal entry that I recognised a *volte-face* in my understanding of both the protagonists' situation and my own life story. My sense is that the emotional healing experience preceded the cognitive understanding, but both elements were necessary to cement the transformational process.

Conclusion

This chapter turns the spotlight on another facet of the immersive literary reading experience, namely, its potential to transform the reader. In other chapters I have highlighted different but inter-related facets of the reading process which are also relevant to the present discussion, but the emphasis is on those elements of reading which I see contributing specifically to the phenomenon of transformation. Of key importance in the first place, I conclude, is the need for the reader to let go (Milner, 1950/2010), variously described by a chain of signifiers: surrendering herself to the experience, adopting a non-defensive or non-egoic mental attitude, divesting herself of preoccupation or alternative agenda, and temporarily merging with the Other in a non-differentiated, regressed psychic state (chapters four and five), which mimics that of mother and infant in early life (Winnicott, 1969). Approaching the occupation with this non-defensive attitude, open to gaining self-knowledge, I find the reader may be rewarded not just with an enjoyable pastime but with a life-changing legacy.

Drawing on my own reading journals as the raw data for theorising about this process, I discover that the Other to whom the reader needs to be open is not the text itself, but the process of reading. This echoes the thinking of Bollas (1987), who identifies the concept of the maternal as being more about an environmental matrix that is created by mother than the discrete individual herself (p. 14). She is the person under whose auspices transformation may occur for the infant, in a similar way to that in which the text is the raw material necessary to facilitate the reading environment. Both mother and text are crucial to the endeavour, but this is because of the milieu they provide rather than in their own right. From this surrendered, regressed position, I conclude, the reader is placed to find herself reflected back in her text, and, in this way, to be known, or ***read***. What emerges to consciousness is what Bollas describes as "the unthought known" (1987), tacit understanding that becomes clarified in the process of reading, and, thus, available to be processed, and become the foundation from which transformation may occur.

I recognise, furthermore, that, in order for the reader to sustain the requisite mental state to afford the possibility of psychic change, the environment of the text must maintain her interest in a state of continuous enchantment and curiousness (emotional and cognitive attraction), that she must be persistently seduced to continue to read, and sustain the mental attitude described. Alongside the mental satisfaction of exercising the epistemic impulse (Klein, 1926, 1932) or desire to learn and be inquisitive, I am suggesting there needs to be also an emotional connection with the text, sufficient to ensure that the reading continues, and I cite instances where the opposite has been true in my own experience.

The final element in the process of transformation is the reader's retrospective reflection on what she has read and its impact upon her, articulating consciously the transformation that has happened unconsciously at the point of reading. I find, from exploration of vignettes of my own personal reading experience, the way the text impacted me was consolidated through taking a reflexive stance in my journalling about it, and the epiphanies emerged from the reflexive exercise, leading to therapeutic psychic transformation.

Chapter eight: Reading and the Unconscious

When I started this research, considering the dynamics of immersive literary reading, I was working on a theory of the conditions (both external and intrapsychic) that needed to pertain, in order for it to be a successful experience for the reader. I drew, *inter alia*, on such principles as Coleridge's idea of the "willing suspension of disbelief" (1817, n.p.), and the concomitant element of psychic regression involved in the reader's stance vis-à-vis her text (Holland, 1975), whilst holding this in tension with a recognition of the requisite level of sophistication in literary skill and capacity for symbolic processing which she must simultaneously employ. Referring to the Kleinian (1946, 1950) concepts of (psychic) life positions, I propounded a ***sophisticated paranoid schizoid*** position, to describe the mental state of the reader, such nomenclature chosen to indicate a mature, non-defensive, use of splitting which pertains in the process of reading.

As my thinking has progressed, however, although my earlier ideas still stand, much of this theorising has been turned on its head. The focus is now less about what needs to be in place, or what qualities and capacities the reader needs in order to make reading a generative experience, but rather how the process of successful immersive literary reading has intrinsic value to the reader, as it facilitates access to her unconscious, which the censorship of normal, social living precludes. It is, therefore, not so much about what conditions and attitudes need to be in place to enhance and ensure the success of the literary reading endeavour, but rather how the ***act*** of immersive reading itself enhances the (outside) life of the reader. Life does not have to accommodate and conform to the dictates of literary reading and create the environment conducive to this, instead immersive engagement with literary fiction creates a matrix through which life (and in particular the unconscious life of the reader) may be experienced. Life is not for reading; reading is for life.

Although reading is a highly sophisticated pastime, within the confines of an immersive literary experience, the effects of civilisation with its superego

restraints are waived, and the reader is free to connect with memories, thoughts, feelings, and desires that had previously been removed from awareness. Thus, the process of reading, far from being just an end in itself (for enjoyment and relaxation), becomes the conduit through which the reader has access to these parts of herself. My thinking goes beyond Freud's assertion that "the real enjoyment of a literary work derives from the relaxation of tensions in our minds" (1908/2003, p. 33), to recognise that it is not simply about the pleasure of being liberated from the mental constraints of social life, but that, as a result of the lifting of that censorship, the immersive reading process is the gateway to accessing the unconscious. This, I find, is, of itself, a life-giving, therapeutic experience. The question is, therefore, less about what needs to be in place to enable a reader to have a successful experience of reading, but how immersive literary reading can take the reader into a generative and fruitful experience of life.

In this chapter, I build particularly on the work of Christopher Bollas (1992, 1995, 1996, 1999), to conclude that engaging in the process of immersive literary reading ***has intrinsic value***, quite apart from its obvious benefits of imparting specific transformational insights (both personal and general, as outlined in chapter seven) and serving as a form of relaxation. I find that immersive literary reading is uniquely placed fully to engage the conscious mind in imaginative enterprise and in so doing allows the unconscious mind simultaneously to access previously repressed material, because the reader is not defending herself against this process, taken up as she is in her reading. Considerable mental effort is expended in everyday life in defending the psyche against unconscious dreams, wishes and fantasies that may be socially unacceptable. Subsumed in the imaginative world of literary fiction, the reader has no need to exercise these superego controls, and this fact of itself, I realise, is of psychic benefit to the individual. The process of reading might be seen as occupying the conscious mind, and so freeing up the unconscious mind, in much the same way as dreaming does. There are very few fora in which the unconscious is given a free voice (partly because of societal taboos and partly because of the emphasis of civilisation on rationality and logical communication). Art and psychotherapy are two such matrices, and I see immersive literary reading

as a particular form of art that privileges this, it being an entirely private undertaking, devoid of the need for censorship. In psychotherapy, although it aims to encourage the analysand's free association and an unrestricted flow of thoughts, and takes place behind closed doors, there is still likely to be some degree of self-censorship as thoughts are brought into the external arena and spoken in the presence of another. The other for the reader (the text), as I have discussed in chapter six, is non-human, and the immersive reading experience occurs entirely within the reader's own mind, so she may, even more than in a psychoanalytic encounter, be without normal psychic constraint engaged in the occupation.

I find that immersive literary reading acts as a container, in the Bionian sense (1970, 2007a), to receive frightening and unprocessed sensory experiences and hold them in mind long enough to be able to digest them, thus freeing up the unconscious, and then go on to debate whether the text itself, even though nonhuman, may be said to have an unconscious. Having established the links to reading and the unconscious, I then consider the question of psychically intense moments that can occur in the process of a reading, and link these to psychoanalytic theory of "screen memories" and "psychic intensities" (Freud, 1899, 1900; Bollas, 1989, 1995), reflecting on how the mental state of the reader evoked by these phenomena mirrors an early ego state of fusion with the maternal object. I conclude by recognising the paradox intrinsic in this line of thought: that the process of reading is both a trigger to evocations and meaningful (previously unconscious) experience, and a distraction from the preoccupations of daily life. The chain of signifiers engaged in the description of these processes (e.g. merger, regression, letting go) also links back to discussion in previous chapters (four and five) where the spotlight has been shone on different aspects of them.

Reading frees up the unconscious

My first, and crucial, point, having researched the immersive reading experience, is that I believe reading frees up the unconscious; that the mental state of the reader in the course of immersing in literary fiction is conducive to connecting with

unconscious mental life. My thesis is that the state of mind of the reader immersed in literary reading provides a similar matrix to that which pertains in the process of dreaming (Freud, 1900, 1905b; Bollas, 1987, 1995), where there is greater access to the unconscious. Bollas (1995) propounds that the process of dreaming models unconscious experiencing, and I find parallels between an individual's mental state while dreaming and engaged in the process of immersive reading.

Dreaming takes place in the context of sleep, where the dreamer's conscious mind is effectively sedated and active thought is bypassed, so unconscious thought can have free rein. For this to happen when the individual is awake and alert, other factors need to be in place to subordinate the conscious superego control of mental processing (Freud, 1909/1962). Another context which seeks to engage with unconscious thought whilst in a waking state is that of psychotherapy. Here the process of free association seeks to gain access to the patient's unconscious. The analysand speaks out in the presence of her analyst her train of thought, ostensibly without censoring anything that comes to mind, to identify unacknowledged thoughts and feelings, in order to arrive at a point where resistance to continue highlights issues which have been repressed for defensive reasons (because they are too painful/unpalatable to admit to) (Freud, 1909/1962, 1915-1917/1973). In order to facilitate the free flow of thought and gain access to the unconscious in this way, external distractions are minimised by maintaining a rigorous therapeutic frame, which includes avoiding external impingements, and tight restrictions on the confidentiality of anything shared in the room, so that normal anxieties about exposure and judgements might be reduced (Spurling, 2015). The patient may still, of course, hold back from complete disclosure, and the presence of ineffable thoughts and feelings take years to be divulged, but it is, perhaps, the nearest situation in normal waking life (along with the confessional) where an individual is able to profess her innermost self.

My thesis is that immersive literary reading in many ways provides a better container than does psychoanalysis in this regard. For the reader of literary fiction,

confidentiality is absolute, as the Other in question is a text and not another person, and any unconscious connections that arise are contained within her own psyche. The reader may have no fear of damning revelations about herself coming to the attention of another, only of what she might discover about herself. Because the usual laws of social life are suspended, the reader is free to absorb herself in her reading without having to make accommodations for anyone else. Just as psychotherapy takes place behind closed doors and others will know not to intrude on a session, so when an individual is immersed in reading, the Other is excluded. Any external intrusions that may occur immediately interrupt the process, such that reading is suspended at that point, and the reader's mental state reverts to that of normal life. Social engagement and immersion in a novel are mutually exclusive, as I discuss in chapter four. The reader's attention is wittingly focused on the text and, provided she is able to divest herself of her own prior preoccupations and focus her energy on her novel, the reader can enter a psychic space removed from everyday reality. Because she knows what she will be reading is fiction, she may suspend any attempt to reality-test what appears within the pages of the book and allow her imagination to engage fully with the story, however plausible or not it may be (Holland, 1975). Thus, she is already predisposed to an imaginative space, the "willing suspension of disbelief" (Coleridge, 1817, n.p.) being *sine qua non* when engaging with literary fiction. The metaphorical brake on creativity is lifted, and the scene is set for a receptivity to out-of-the-ordinary material. In this space, whilst her conscious mind is concentrating on the narrative that she is reading, I conclude that her unconscious mind is simultaneously free to wander and to process. The storyline or descriptions she reads may trigger a series of evocations, or screen memories (Freud, 1900) with which her unconscious is free to engage and associate.

Literary fiction is already privileging the imagination over concrete reality, so conditions are in place for engagement with the unconscious in a similar manner. Parallels with the therapeutic situation are clear here also, in that "… the analyst's frame of mind allies with the unconscious, adopting a mentality that, as it becomes timeless, plastic and open to contradiction, develops into an unconscious

sensibility" (Bollas, 1995, p. 14). So, too, I conclude, the reader, whilst at the same time tracking the narrative of the text at one level, at another is contemporaneously open to her own reveries, associations, random connections, etc.

Unconscious thinking does not obey the rules of conscious thinking and so is unencumbered by the need for logical, linear, or rational sequence, and can hold in tension ambiguities and anomalies without conflict (Freud, 1912; Bollas, 1995). My presupposition, in line with psychoanalytic thought (Heimann, 1950), is that unconscious mental life is in advance of conscious mental life, the latter being restricted and constrained by societal taboos and the Western emphasis on reason and rationality. Thus, an individual who connects with unconscious thought has an opportunity to engage with life at a deeper, more meaningful level. Immersive literary reading, *ergo*, has generative potential in its capacity to provide the forum for participating in life more fully. This relates not simply to the reader gaining awareness of, and connecting with, previously repressed parts of the self, but also engaging her unconscious in those areas where she does not gain awareness, which is of itself, psychically liberating.

It could be argued that in psychotherapy the patient is free to start talking about whatever she chooses, whereas, when reading, the reader's associations are guided by the text as a starting point, so the unconscious is in some way steered in a certain direction. I would counter that by suggesting that the point at which the analysand begins her session will have been triggered by some external event/thought from which the train of free associations flow, in exactly the same way as a seemingly random description or occurrence recounted in a novel will initiate the stream of consciousness of the reader.

Container/contained

My thesis, then, is that the process of immersive literary reading acts as a container which occupies the conscious mind, simultaneously facilitating the unconscious mind to be free to connect with memories, associations, and evocations as they arise in the process. I refer here specifically to Bion's concept of containment (1970, 2007a), which goes beyond the idea simply of holding, to providing a matrix in which the unthinkable may be embraced and thought about. He writes of ***beta elements*** referred to as "undigested facts" (1962, p. 7) to symbolise their raw, primitive nature, which need to be worked upon by alpha function to "bridge the gap between sense-data and appreciation of sense-data" (1962, p. 309), to convert them into alpha elements, available for processing and thinking through. In other words, the container (the process of immersive literary reading), by keeping in mind inchoate sensory experience, enables it to be articulated, to take shape and form, and be contemplated, so that its meaning may be understood. In normal functioning, because they are unbearable, an individual seeks to evacuate the uncomfortable beta elements into an Other by means of projective identification. For the infant, it is traditionally the function of the maternal to contain these frightening elements, holding onto and metabolising them in order to return them to the baby in a more digestible and less toxified form (Zeavin, 2011). The process of reading a literary text, I conclude, performs this containing, maternal function. Frightening, shameful or otherwise unbearable aspects of the reader's psyche may come to awareness in the context of her reading, as she may be confronted by resonances of her own experience in the lives of the characters of her novel, or the train of her reverie. Essentially, I see the text as performing a type of alpha function in articulating the previously inarticulable, providing words for the ineffable, which then allow it to be pondered and worked through, rather than banished to the unconscious.

The process of immersive literary reading, I discovered, offers containment in two ways. First, by continuing with its narrative, presenting unpleasant or painful truths, the text models an openness to, and capacity to face and process,

unpalatable elements of human life. Secondly, the manner in which the story is related, it being aesthetically pleasing and couched in literary language, makes the material accessible and digestible. Thus, it performs the maternal function of metabolising the ineffable/unbearable and presenting it back to the reader in a form that may be thought about. In developmental terms, the second phase of the containment process involves the individual being able to take back her projections and mourn the loss of the containing Other, in order to learn to be separate and face her own demons (Cartwright, 2010). This I see mirrored in the literary reading experience, as the reader, being emboldened to own her own autobiographical resonances with her text, has the opportunity to reflect upon and process her own situation. I raise the question also in chapter six as to whether this containment is mutual: as the reading contains the reader, does the reader also (in the process of reading) perform a containment function for the text? That the reading process happens entirely within her psyche as she internalises what she reads, means that she may be seen to be containing/sitting with/holding in mind the text, as the text also contains her.

The unconscious of the text?

In the psychoanalytical context, it is recognised that unconscious communication takes place between analyst and analysand without passing through conscious awareness (Freud, 1915; Bollas, 1995). To extend such thinking to the experience of immersive literary reading poses the question of whether the text could be said to have an unconscious. Bollas, certainly, claims that literary experience is only an example of what happens more deeply between two people (1995). I have found that the effect of a text can be just as profound upon the individual reader as a person-to-person interaction, the primary difference being that it might be considered to be a unilateral process, where the reader alone is affected, and the text is unaltered. The claim that the novel is unchanged, however, could be countered by suggesting that the (real life of) the text exists only within the mind and psyche of the reader, and so it alters on each reading by each reader. It may subsist as a concrete object of paper and ink (or electronic reproduction thereof), but it only

assumes a vitality when it is ***in the process of being read*** by an individual, and so effectively exists only in that person's awareness. Every reading of a text is individual and has life in that moment only. A reader may read the same book several times, but each reading will be different and nuanced in her mind, as she approaches it from a unique personal context and situation on each occasion (Holland, 1973; Bollas, 1995). Thus, the text has a fluidity and morphs every time it is read, its impact upon the reader in each reading being unique, so it could be argued that it ***does*** have an unconscious.

Literary theory also has a contribution to make to this debate. I have explored quite fully in chapter six Rosenblatt's (1994) ideas of intersubjectivity, and reiterate the point here, emphasising the nature of the exchange. Arguing that reading may best be described as a relationship between reader and text, she draws attention to the role taken up by each participant:

> First, the text is the stimulus that focuses the reader's attention so that elements of past experience … are activated. Second, as the reader seeks a hypothesis to guide the selecting, rejecting and ordering of what is being called forth, the text helps to regulate what shall be held in the forefront of the reader's attention (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 11).

In other words, the workings of the text on the mind of the reader serve to stimulate specific memories and evocations, and to maintain her focus. Although the process happens entirely within the reader's psyche, the text plays a key role in guiding her imagination and influencing the triggers to her reverie. The text is more than just an initial prompt from which the reader's reverie may develop, it serves to keep her on track and keep bringing her back to the novel. This is an important part of what I see as the containing function of the text: that although the reader engages with reminiscences from her own transferences and evocations, this does not completely overtake or overwhelm her, as she is still immersed in the reading and following the text. Thus, the stimulus and the stimulated participate in an ongoing dance throughout the whole process of reading. Rosenblatt, further, recognises that those elements in the text that become stimuli to the reader are individual to that

particular reader only, becoming stimuli by "virtue of what the organism is already preoccupied with" (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 17), as if the text were to know what would resonate with that particular reader in that specific time and context. Textual awareness is, therefore, implicit.

Ecologically, also, Rosenblatt advances an argument for person and environment/reader and text being part of a whole, "a total situation … each conditioned by and conditioning the other" (1994, p. 18). This reciprocity carries with it also the notion of union and a relationship that transcends the individual participants, to embrace a more global understanding of interconnectivity. Each has an impact on the other, but each is also part of the other and possesses knowledge of the other. The text, *ergo*, might be construed as having unconscious knowledge of the reader through this global connection. The differentiation between subject and object being blurred in this way, it is totally reasonable to claim the text has an unconscious awareness of the reader.

A further argument for the existence of the unconscious of a text may be in consideration of a particular choice of book at a specific time, and/or, indeed why a reader decides to pick up her novel at a certain time in her day/life. In previous chapters I have cited examples from my own reading where I have found myself reading vignettes that resonate so sharply with my experience at the time that the synchronicity appears mystical, or uncanny. A striking example is given in chapter six where I write of my experience of picking up Tolstoy's (1899/2014) novel *Resurrection*, at a time when I was anticipating the death of my father. Nekhlyudov's rationalisation of his longing for his mother to die entirely matched my own sense of finding unbearable the long vigil of my father's last weeks. Although I would have struggled to articulate to any but myself how I longed to be spared the agony of those visits, preferring to talk of wanting his release from his suffering for his own sake, when I read those words I was able to connect with what I had been unwilling to admit, and found a great relief in doing so. Had I read that vignette at any other time in my life, I doubt I would even have remembered it. It

was poignant because of the timing. Was there, then, an unconscious connection that I experienced with Tolstoy's text at that time? Without doubt. Does this mean that the text has an unconscious? It could certainly be argued so.

I cannot find an alternative satisfactory answer to the question of why such synchronous events occur, for they are not logical and could not be rationally contrived. There is no algorithm to determine the confluence of coincident processes, nor do I think there should there be. It is part of the mystery and wonder of synchronicity and why it is so poignant when it arises. Psychoanalysts are familiar with the coincidence of unconscious memories resurfacing in line with anniversary dates that are not consciously in mind (Bollas, 1995), or the confluence of analyst's and analysand's thinking of events or people not directly linked to their current dialogue. Bollas gives an example of one such occasion where a husband and wife out of the blue simultaneously find themselves thinking about an individual called Ted and concludes they would never "know why they joined together over Ted and not over another mental content at that moment. ***It was simply time to think about Ted***" (1995, p. 36, italics mine). He recognises the work of the (collective) unconscious in such synchronicity and contents himself with this explanation of a seemingly uncanny occurrence. It was just the right time for the thoughts to occur. This I claim as the reason for my own experience of reading *Resurrection* (Tolstoy, 1899/2014) cited above. It was simply the right time for me to read that part of my novel, the confluence of my own unconscious and that of the text making a very powerful connection. In citing examples of such synchronous connections between individuals, Bollas states: "I believe that our ordinary experiences of psychically intense moments during the day suggest to us the presence of unconscious meaning and unconscious work" (1995, p. 37). That the unconscious world exists in parallel to our conscious lives would not be disputed by many (certainly in the psychoanalytic sector). It, therefore, follows that a literary text may be seen to have an unconscious dimension.

Screen memories and psychic intensities

Returning to my earlier claim that immersive literary reading in some ways mirrors the process of dreaming, and building on the concept of unconscious connection, I come now to discuss the issue of screen memories and psychic intensities, and why these might be such a vital part of the successful experience of reading. Of the latter, Bollas elucidates thus:

> Everyday experiences evoke what Freud called "psychic intensities" as a slightly different "degree of interest" arises in a single moment that awakens memories, instinctual states, and vivid thoughts. Such psychic intensities become "latent thoughts," congregations of unconscious views of experience transformed from … undigested and meaningless facts of existence to … mental material stored for dreams and thoughts to come (Bollas, 1995, p. 48).

Psychic intensities may be evoked from "screen memories" (Freud, 1899), which term refers to reminiscences of vignettes of everyday life, which of themselves are mundane and seemingly inconsequential, and yet which are powerful, vivid recollections, imbued with emotion by virtue of their belonging to yesteryear and the re-evocation of earlier life. They could be said to be those elements that breathe life into the dry bones of factual or numerical content. Bollas (1995) makes the point that, when giving a potted history of oneself, one is unlikely to refer to screen memories, and rather focus on the bald (boring) facts and statistics of significant milestone events. Screen memories, however, provide little glimpses into what it was like to be oneself at that time, and they are psychically significant because they embrace feelings, desires, and evocations. These are the vignettes that analysands present to their therapists: the seemingly trivial memories of childhood (the donkey ride, the green shoes, the ice cream on the beach, etc.) which become imbued with significance because something powerful was happening psychically at the time. Written fiction draws very heavily on a literary equivalent of creating screen memories, such vignettes evoking the scene and backdrop of the action, which context is enormously important in enabling the reader to lose herself in her imagination of what is being depicted, and at the same time evoke in the reader connection with screen memories of her own. Were the novel simply to catalogue a series of events without backdrop or reference to the emotional experience of the

dramatis personae, the reader would not be able to immerse so easily, and the narrative would remain at a psychic distance from her (much like the reading of non-fiction texts). Literary screen evocations (for I cannot call them "memories" as they are new creations and not reminiscences, even though they may effect a nostalgia in the reader) paint a picture, drawing on the imagination and connecting emotionally with the reader, as they become infused with psychic intensity through the process of reading. These, I conclude, are the essence of what secures the reader's immersion, fully engage her conscious mind and free up her unconscious in the process.

While Bollas does not clarify what might cause something to be transformed from a mundane experience to a psychic intensity, i.e. what might determine whence the different degree of interest arises (which could be something of a circular argument to consider whether the latent thought triggered the psychic intensity or vice versa, or, indeed, whether an unrelated circumstance might contribute to a lowering of psychic defence to enable connection at a deeper level with a particular trigger), what is of interest with regards to reading, is the presence and nature of these more emotionally laden thoughts and experiences. Successful, deep immersion in a text depends upon the reader being able emotionally to connect with the scenes being depicted to a degree greater than that experienced in normal life. I offer a literary example to illustrate the point. Consider the following:

> One wintry evening, early in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and eighty, a keen north wind arose as it grew dark, and night came on with black and dismal looks. A bitter storm of sleet, sharp, dense and icy-cold, swept the wet streets, and rattled on the trembling windows. Sign-boards, shaken past endurance in their creaking frames, fell crashing on the pavement; old tottering chimneys reeled and staggered in the blast; and many a steeple rocked again that night, as though the earth were troubled (Dickens, 1841/2010, p. 281).

The context of the events which were to follow in the narrative was dusk on a cold, wet, winter's day. Rather than baldly stating that fact, however, Dickens's description in the above excerpt from *Barnaby Rudge* evokes the misery and hostility of the weather graphically, in such a way that the reader can visualise the

signboards and in her imagination hear them rasping on their hinges as the icy wind blows, heralding a foreboding of events that are to unfold. To those familiar with winter in the British Isles, such a scenario is a commonplace seasonal experience, and yet the powerful description educes an emotional response in the reader, which takes her beyond the story and into a different psychic space where imagination and personal resonance come together powerfully. This is the phenomenon I am calling the literary equivalent of a screen memory, or a screen evocation: real life, commonplace scenarios vividly depicted that become emotionally laden, and hold significant meaning. Literary references such as "… as though the earth were troubled …" (Dickens, 1841/2010, p. 281) contribute to the hypercathexis of the ordinary, drawing the reader's attention to details laden with meaning, mystery, and curiosity, designed to evoke in her an emotional response.

I conclude that this becomes possible by virtue of the fact that in the process of immersive reading, the reader has an opportunity to connect with her latent thoughts, and "[b]ecause a latent thought is an unconscious idea, it differs from the way the conscious mind, with its discretionary powers of judgment, rationally bifurcates lived experience" (Bollas, 1995, p. 48). So, the reader is able to access these latent thoughts in an uncensored way, making random connections with a variety of evocations, experiences, and memories simultaneously. The reading of scholarly fiction, by virtue of its literary character, given to rich evocative descriptions and scene-setting (Knights, 1995), is a fertile matrix from which latent thoughts can be evinced, and psychically intense moments occur.

"A psychic intensity, …" states Bollas, "… is a momentous condensation in which many truths are conjured, often through the evocative effect of any object" (1995, p. 67). I believe immersive literary reading to be such an object, and that the latent thoughts of the reader, freed up in the process, may be distilled into vivid, meaningful moments, or psychic intensities, at various points in the reading experience. As the dreamer, on waking from her dream, so the reader, emerging from her text, will know that she has undergone a deep emotional (possibly life-

changing) experience, through connection with her latent thoughts, accessed from screen memories/evocations which have been psychically hypercathected.

The reader may not be aware of the content of these thoughts and unconscious connections (though she may be conscious of some which become transformational experiences, as discussed in chapter seven), but she will be aware of a shift having taken place within herself. This, I conclude, is because the reading experience in and of itself can be transforming, which leads me to consider this question of the overall process of reading of itself.

Reading as a whole experience

As noted in chapter seven, I conclude that the ***process*** of reading itself becomes the Other, and not the text itself. Here I develop this thinking a little further in the light of the discussion around reading and the unconscious, and find that much of the value of immersive literary reading is in the experience as a whole, quite apart from the transformations that may occur as a result of insights and personal epiphanies (such as I have illustrated in chapters four and seven). This goes beyond Freud's early averring that "… the real enjoyment of a literary work derives from the relaxation of tensions in our minds" (1908/2003, p. 33), as I think it is not simply a question of enjoyment, but of a more deeply life-enhancing experience.

Bollas captures this thinking with respect to psychoanalysis: "All along, what has seemed to be the means to truth – free association – is the truth itself …" (1995, pp. 69-70). "The royal road ***is*** free associative discourse itself, not whatever the discourse may seem to be about" (Bollas, 1995, p. 70, footnote, italics mine). So, also, with the reading of literary fiction, I conclude the generative experience derives from ***being engaged in*** the process, quite apart from the content of the narrative and any personal resonances the reader may find therein. My thesis is that the experience itself takes the reader into a mental space that re-evokes an early ego state – that of fusion with the maternal object (as discussed in chapter five) – which, of itself, can be liberating and life-giving. As Bollas argues for free

association in the psychoanalytic context, that the individual is changed "… through existential alteration to the subject's being, brought about by immersive engagement with the object at a deeply unconscious level …" (1995, p. 82), so I find that where that deep level of engagement with a text occurs, the person of the reader is metamorphosed ***by virtue of being absorbed in the process***. Reading itself (not the text) becomes the transformational object. The reader herself is changed, not simply her understanding.

In object relations terms, Bollas (1987, 1989, 1995) designates as *integral objects* those objects where the value is in the thing itself, such as I find here for the process of reading. "The object is not only a container which receives the subject's projective identifications but a thing with a structure which … has a specific (even if individual) effect upon the person" (Bollas, 1995, p. 87). He elaborates further:

> Ironically, although the object is what matters, through its use by the subject it becomes transformed into an elaboration of the individual's subjectivity. Once used it is forgotten although its particular psychic status will be stored in the unconscious as a thing *transformed* and *transforming*. I may discover a new book and read it, but in my doing so, both the book and I are transformed (Bollas, 1995, p. 90).

That the object itself, although significant, has import more for the use it has to the reader as "an elaboration of the individual's subjectivity" (Bollas, 1995, p. 90) is of profound consequence to my conclusion and borne out by my experience as a reader. I am often concerned that I forget characters and stories of novels which at the time of reading have been very meaningful to me. Does my lack of memory equate to a lack of value placed on the text? Most assuredly not. The reading experience itself, which is situated in time and space, has a lasting legacy in that I, as the reader, am altered as a result of having engaged with it. The actual remembered details of the plot are relatively unimportant in this process. The change to the self persists after the cognitive remembering has disappeared.

A further point to notice, too, is that the experience itself cannot be recreated. It is situational, contextual, and needs to be regarded as such. To refer

back to my portal novel, *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971), which I am using as a methodology to highlight the process of immersive, literary reading (chapter three), it can be observed that, having had his experience of the "*domaine étrange*"[60] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 65), where he so totally gives himself to the mysterious events that unfold, try as he might after returning to school following his adventure, Augustin cannot recapture the experience. Even eventually finding his way back to the location at a later date, and meeting up with Yvonne de Galais and her brother, Frantz, he is unable to recreate the original dynamics. Everything has changed. Time has passed and it is impossible to replicate the erstwhile feelings of euphoria and awe. He is left only with nostalgia. The context and situation of any reading experience are entirely idiosyncratic and cannot be replicated arbitrarily. This is, of course, what makes it so dynamic and intersubjective.

Drawing on the heuristic part of my research again, here, I draw on data from my personal reading journals to explore this point further and illustrate the difficulty I experienced in seeking arbitrarily to recreate a generative reading experience. A very close friend of mine had a catastrophic stroke some nine months ago now, and I have been emotionally connected with his progress and subsequent (slow) recovery. He lives a few hours' drive away from me, so I was visiting initially only fortnightly, but I was aware of how preoccupying the situation was to me, even when I was not present, and how much emotional energy it demanded of me constantly. The impact of this upon my reading was startling. Entries in my research journal over this period catalogue my difficult relationship with reading. I note not being able to find the energy to cross the threshold into letting go to the reading experience, whilst simultaneously longing to lose myself in it.

My writing reflects the paradox of knowing that I would probably find relief, were I able to engage with a novel, and yet my seeming inability to be able to do so. Despite various attempts to engage in reading four books during this period,

[60] strange habitation

I found I was unable to have a successful reading experience, apart from one notable exception which will be discussed a little later in the chapter. Perhaps, like Meaulnes, I was trying too hard to recapture a past experience of bliss, which would have been such a welcome relief from the sense of grief I lived with day by day. Reflecting on the experience, it would be too simplistic to put it down to my mental and emotional preoccupation, though these must certainly be important factors in the equation. I recognise, however, that my ability to let go (in the Milnerian (1950/2010) sense) (chapter three) and give myself over to the (reading) other was seriously impaired, and clearly there was some ambivalence on my part about doing this. Perhaps I felt guilty if I managed to have an enjoyable experience while my friend lived day to day in pain and distress, and so I prevented myself from doing so? Perhaps my emotional energy was all invested in the real-life situation, such that it was too exacting to introduce another demand (that of reading)? Perhaps the struggle of life and my awareness of the inevitability of death and human beings' eventual demise meant that it seemed a futile exercise, much as life itself felt pointless at the time? Perhaps, as noted earlier in the discussion about synchronicity, it was simply ***not*** the time for me to be reading? I am sure there is some truth in each of these possibilities, but my interest at this juncture is thinking about the impossibility of being able to engage meaningfully with all bar one of the novels I attempted.

Even though I forced myself at times to pick up a book and read a few pages, I could not, even by a supreme act of the will, create that level of psychic engagement over those months. I read over half of Stendhal's (1982/2015) *The red and the black*, a good proportion of Hardy's (1890-1893/2002b) *Life's little ironies*, and completed Gaskell's (1854-1855/1994) *North and south*, but I would not consider myself immersed in any of the texts to the point of freeing up my unconscious or losing myself in their pages. My eyes deciphered the words, but my mind was far from meaningfully engaged.

That this phenomenon concerned only works of literary fiction is evidenced by the fact that throughout this time I was able to read reference and non-fiction texts with a reasonable degree of engagement, and, although perhaps at times preoccupied (so that my attention wandered), it did not stop me being able successfully to read and understand theoretical writings in the same way that I felt incapacitated when trying to apply myself to fiction. This, of course, raises a further question about the demands of immersive literary reading, and the type of psychic energy required of the reader to invest in the process (I discuss in chapter six the issue of the active/passive dimension of reading). What I am concerned with here, however, is recognising that it is the process of literary immersion as a thing in itself with which it has to do; that it is far more than simply deciphering symbols on a page and applying cognitive understanding to a chain of events (however enjoyable and intellectually satisfying this exercise may be), these elements being only a small part of the whole experience which also demands a high degree of emotional engagement from the reader, and that it is ***that process itself*** which is the Other. Over and above the process of letting go psychically (which I discuss at length in chapter four), which does demand a conscious decision to surrender to the process (and which I might have found difficult at the time in question, being weighed down with real-life preoccupations), engaging with a novel demands something more active of the reader also. As considered in chapter six, I outline the fact that reading is a dance between reader and text in which both are actively (and passively) engaged (Benjamin, 1998). The reader's contribution to this exchange starts with a conscious decision and goes beyond the discipline of applying herself deliberately to her reading, concentrating her mind and actively seeking to eschew interruptions, because reading is a dynamic, creative act, and she is effectively crafting the narrative in her imagination as she reads. She is not simply absorbing wholesale a finished article, but actively reading in (Knights, 1995) to what is on the page, fashioning it after her own imaginings. This demands mental and emotional energy, such as I did not possess at the point of writing the journal entries detailed above. Ironically, I believe that, had I found the capacity to be able to apply myself to my novel, and successfully been absorbed in the process, I might have found

relief and something of the relaxation of mental and emotional tension (Freud, 1908/2003, p. 33) that troubled me in those days, but the ability eluded me, despite my best efforts.

Aesthetic and anaesthetic

I now open up some debate about the interesting paradox which is the fact that, in immersive literary reading, the text can act both as the trigger to emotive evocations, whilst at the same time providing a distraction from the preoccupations of everyday life; it can both bring poignant awareness and dull it.

I was struck, while reviewing some hand-written annotations I had made to certain notes I had written about my readings of Bollas (1989, 1995) around this topic, by what appeared to be an allusion to "anaesthetic experience", which made me sit up. Of course, I had cursorily misread my quasi-indecipherable scribbles, which were concerned with transformation happening in the context of "an aesthetic experience", but this led me to muse on the idea of anaesthesia in the context of reading. Might "anaesthetic" be construed as the opposite of "aesthetic", the former referring to a deadening of the senses, the latter to a heightening thereof? It struck me that the function of the repressed unconscious is an anaesthetic one, though I had not thought of it in those terms before. It is about banishing from awareness those perceptions, and sensations that might cause pain. The administering of intravenous sedation preparatory to an operation on the body has the effect of rendering a patient unconscious, so that the pain of surgical procedure does not register in her awareness. The painful sensations are still present, but the patient is unaware of them. Comparable psychic anaesthesia may be achieved by an individual exiling to the unconscious painful memories, so that she is not troubled by awareness of them – an everyday phenomenon used by individuals the world over, which psychoanalysts refer to as ego defences (Spurling, 2015).

An aesthetic experience, *au contraire*, is characterised by its function of intensifying sensate experience in some way or another. It is as if a magnifying glass were placed around an occurrence, and the intricate nuances of its composition were highlighted in technicolour. This I link to my earlier discussion of screen memories (or what I termed "screen evocations" in the case of literary fiction), where the essence of an experience is distilled into evocative description, such that not only is the event captured but the accompanying emotional overlay engaged with by the reader. This is, as I have shown, what contributes to the experience of "psychic intensities" (Bollas, 1995) in connection with reading. That immersive literary reading evokes a series of psychic intensities in the reader evidences this enhanced sense of vibrancy: an experience of life that is more alive than normal life itself.

Psychic intensities spotlight different facets of life as the reader engages with a piece of literary fiction and draw attention to elements of the reader's own past experiences in a way in which she was previously not fully aware, if cognizant at all. Couple this with the freedom to engage with her unconscious in the process of reading (as I discussed at the start of this chapter), another process of powerful connections, it may be concluded that the reader's experience of reading is rich, essentially engaging and vivid, a truly aesthetic encounter with an Other. In order for the spotlight to be shone so brightly on these experiences, anything which would preoccupy or hinder the requisite level of engagement needs to go into abeyance. This is the paradox which reading highlights, its aesthetic and simultaneous anaesthetic functions: those of heightened psychic aliveness depending on the inhibiting of current preoccupations, mundane concerns, responsibilities etc. Being alive in one arena requires being deadened in another. This situation might be said to pertain whenever one is required to engage with full concentration on any activity; that which takes the foreground and becomes the focus necessarily puts other affairs temporarily in the background. What is unique to reading, however, is that the active mind must be engaged in the process. It is not simply a question of single-mindedness and switching off certain parts of

awareness so as to emphasise others, for, as I have shown, the unconscious mind needs to be freed up and engaged in the process. This cannot be achieved by active censorship or repression. It is the conscious mind that needs to be free from preoccupation, in order to engage with the text, and it is only as the conscious mind is fully engaged in the pursuit of immersive reading, that the unconscious mind is liberated to make its connections, associate to the evocations and enhance the experience.

I now consider this paradoxical phenomenon in the light of my own reading experience and explore my journal entries about the process of reading the one book with which I was successfully able to engage over the several months referred to earlier. The text in question is Gaskell's *Ruth* (1853/1998b). Although there are no obvious parallels with my own autobiography, nor anything apart from synchronicity to suppose that I should be particularly drawn to this novel, above, for example, *North and South* (Gaskell, 1854-1855/1994) which I read also during the same nine-month period, I was for the most part, uncharacteristically able to engage with it. At the point of absorption in the process of reading, it acted as a welcome distraction from the emotional load of everyday life that I was feeling at the time, whilst it also took me deeper into my own psychic process and connected me with those thoughts and feelings at a profound level.

In contrast to my experience with other novels I attempted to read during this period, I noted in my reading journal that "I was totally immersed and lost in it, such that I took time out … to finish it …" It gripped me and enabled me to be fully present to my reading experience in such a way that it provided some relief from feelings of grief and loss that pervaded at the time. This is interesting in that, ironically, it was principally feelings of grief and loss that were depicted in the novel. There was something compelling about the desire to engage in its pages, and it assumed primary importance, allowing me temporarily to lose myself and my real-life concerns in the text.

I believe there was also something which does have to do with the content of the narrative, which enabled me to access unconscious associations of my own and connect with elements of my own life story. It was not the facts of Gaskell's narrative with which I made links (which is why I believe I was making unconscious connections), but the tenor of the story that resonated. Unlike with other transformational experiences of reading (see chapters four and seven) where I have been able to make links to particular parts of my autobiography and gain fresh perspective and a new emotional relationship with them, this was different, less clearly defined in terms of the content. My journal picks up this theme:

> There were no epiphanies or particular transformational moments in the reading of this novel, but the final pages culminating in the reading of the passage from Revelation [ch. 7, v. 14] about "these are they that have come out of great tribulation" somehow resonated very deeply with my general sense of experience at the moment. I have been deeply immersed in [my friend]'s progress over the summer and watching his rehabilitation week by week. Certainly, the whole stroke experience has been a great tribulation and the joy of, hopefully, his coming home later this week, is forever marred by the sadness of the reality of the devastating experience and what it leaves in its wake. Life is full of sorrow and trials and losses and things that might have been, and I am keenly aware of this as I go through life at the moment. Nothing can undo or compensate for the individual tragedies and traumas of individuals' lives. We simply have to accept what has happened and allow it to transform us.

Although the primary links in my mind to the idea of undergoing tribulation and hardships in life were to this most recent experience of my friend's stroke (both his grief and my own), other bereavements and heartaches were also condensed by unconscious connection to crystallise into a profound sense of loss and the weight of the sadness of the human condition and life in general. A later journal entry continues to pick up this theme:

> I was very gratified that *Ruth* did not have a happy ending, much as part of me was hoping that it would and that there would be a reunion between Ruth and [her erstwhile lover] Bellingham at last, as it would have felt inappropriate and unreal. Life does not have happy endings. That is not what we are about. There are deeply moving experiences and expressions of love that are very meaningful, but they come about because of the sadnesses, mistakes, poor decisions, etc., that we make, and go hand in hand with them. One does not cancel out the other. There is no *happily ever after* or *going off into the sunset* in one's twilight years with nothing but good things ahead. Somehow Gaskell has captured this in *Ruth*, and it has been a

> timely and profoundly moving and meaningful novel for me to read at this point in my life.

As noted earlier, because the unconscious does not operate in a linear way, by connecting with it through the process of reading this novel, my mind was freed up to engage with a plethora of life events, disappointments, regrets and losses which were condensed (Bollas, 1995) into a general sense of sorrow that I felt keenly at the point of reading. I would have been unable to apportion a particular feeling to a certain event, though held a sense of the multiple bereavements aggregating in the heaviness I experienced. There was, however, gratification in the text's recognition of painful endings, and the burden of the human condition, which I found healing.

This example serves to illustrate that sense of paradox inherent in a successful reading experience, where I/the reader can be at one and the same time distracted from the pain of real life situations and emotions, whilst also feeling a deep connection with powerful poignant sentiments evoked by unconscious linking in the process of reading, the reading experience itself acting as the container for these.

Conclusion

In this chapter the facet of the experience of immersive literary reading which comes under the microscope is the role of the unconscious in the process. The beneficial attributes of reading scholarly fiction, which throughout my research I variously term transformational, generative, or therapeutic, are considered in relation to the part played by unconscious phenomena, and I debate the nature of the tacit bond between reader and text, with particular reference to the work of Bollas (1978, 1987, 1989, 1992, 1995). I trace the journey of my thinking which started out with an initial focus on the conditions that need to be in place in order for reading to be a satisfactory and generative process, and the reader adopting what I am terming a ***sophisticated paranoid schizoid*** mentality in order to be successfully split off from reality to engage with a fictional world, whilst drawing on accomplished, literary, and symbolic skills. As I further researched this process,

my thinking was turned on its head, as the question morphed from what needs to be in place to make a successful reading experience, to recognising the value of an engaged reading experience *per se* in providing the reader with an environment in which she can engage with her unconscious. Rather than exploring the conditions and phenomena that contribute to making literary reading successful (or not), I began to think about how the experience of reading itself has intrinsic value and can enhance life. Instead of literary reading being the conduit, it becomes the end in itself, and of value as a process in its own right, largely because of its function in freeing up the unconscious.

I liken the immersive reading experience to that of dreaming, the state of mind of the reader being similar to that of the dreamer, where the unconscious is free to connect with condensations of meaning of vignettes of life experiences past and present (Bollas, 1995), the process itself being the key, whether individual incidents are later remembered or not. Discussion of the reader's unconscious leads to the question of whether the text, also, has an unconscious. Here I draw particularly on the concept of synchronicity to illustrate the otherwise inexplicable attunement of reader and a particular text. Drawing on Rosenblatt's (1994) thinking which sees a person and her environment as part of an ecological whole, the text is seen as part of that ecosystem, it and the reader each providing the requisite environment for the other, and each having a key part to play in the interaction. Far from being inert and static, therefore, the text is credited with an active role, both conscious and unconscious in the practice.

Further concepts that are explored in the process of freeing up the unconscious are those of ***screen memories*** and ***psychic intensities*** (Freud, 1899, 1900; Bollas, 1989, 1995), phenomena identified in psychoanalysis as holding particular significance. Screen memories provide a graphic glimpse into the emotional experience of everyday occurrences, imbuing them with particular psychic significance. I conclude that this process is also mirrored in the reading of literary fiction, where evocative descriptions echo a parallel to screen memories, and induce

in the reader a quality of emotional experience that becomes psychically intense. I further argue that it is the whole experience of reading that is at play, in the shape of what Bollas (1995) terms an *integral object*, rather than the reader just identifying transferences with certain passages that have transformational potential; that it is the experience as a whole which has potential to alter the reader, by virtue of her having been engaged with the text. In this context I also recognise that it is an experience in the moment, which cannot be replicated (even if the same reader reads the same text), each experience-of-reading having its own unique, intrinsic value.

I conclude by addressing the paradox which I find in immersive reading, that it can contemporaneously provide a distraction and retreat from the cares and concerns of everyday life, whilst also taking the reader more deeply into experiencing a heightened awareness of her thoughts and feelings. I discuss the idea that the reading process might be seen to be aesthetic and also anaesthetic, implicit in the former an intensifying of psychic aliveness, and in the latter a deadening effect on the troubles of outside life. It is, I conclude, this complexity and capacity of the immersive reading process which make it so powerful and life-enhancing.

Chapter nine: Concluding remarks

This study offers an original contribution to developing an understanding of the process of the immersive reading of literary fiction, whilst also preserving and revering the mystery of it. The undertaking of writing this thesis has been an experience of intense theoretical engagement at the same time as taking me into a journey of deep personal reflexivity, the juxtaposition of such seemingly contradictory elements characterising the work and its findings. It is not about literature *per se* nor, indeed, a literary criticism, and yet literature is intrinsically and fundamentally bound up in the process of reading and it is drawn upon in a variety of ways (as outlined in chapter one) throughout the research and I refer particularly to the work of literary theorists Barthes (1975, 1977), de Certeau (1984) and Rosenblatt (1960, 1982, 1986, 1994, 1998). Equally, the project is not about psychoanalysis, nor, indeed, psychotherapeutic practice, yet psychoanalytic thinking is core to my conceptualisations because of my interest in the part which the unconscious plays in reading, and I am informed by key psychoanalytic theorists, notably Benjamin (1990, 1995, 1998, 2004, 2005a, 2005b), Bollas (1978, 1982, 1987, 1992, 1995, 1999, 2009) Milner (1934/52, 1937/86, 1950/2010, 1969, 1987c) and Winnicott (1953, 1958, 1960, 1967b, 1969, 1971, 1986) *inter alia*. My findings also show that the process of immersive literary reading can, itself, be a therapeutic and healing process for the reader.

My thesis is that immersive literary reading is a unique experience and, by virtue of the idiosyncratic nature of the psychic space occupied by the reader and her relationship with her text, provides a rare forum which embraces both conscious and unconscious awareness, a process which, of itself is beneficial and also through which the reader has the potential to experience personal transformation. Freud averred that "… the real enjoyment of a literary work derives from the relaxation of tensions in our minds" (1908/2003, p. 33). I go beyond that to posit that this is just the starting point and the attitude with which a reader approaches her text is the crucible from which psychic change can occur. In order for it to be a successful experience, it behoves the literary reader to approach the

practice from a psychically undefended position, actively to let go of ego boundaries and become one with her text, taking her into a regressed state akin to that merger which pertained with the primal maternal object. If conducive conditions are present (which I outline in chapter five) and she is able to lose herself in this way, my conclusion is that the reader is available to engage in an intersubjective relationship with her novel which is potentially generative. It can be a restorative process in which insight is coupled with emotional experience with possible life-changing ramifications, conceivably as therapeutic as is psychotherapy itself. I find that because the Other in the dyadic reading experience is non-human, ego defences can much more easily fall away than in the psychoanalytic environment, where it might take years for the patient to reach the same level of honesty with her analyst.

As I engaged with my exploration into the nature and mystery of the immersive reading experience, it became apparent that there are a number of paradoxes to be embraced in adumbrating the process. In these concluding remarks, I highlight these paradoxes, as a way of summarising the findings. They are: (1) that the reading of scholarly fiction is concurrently a sophisticated, erudite activity requiring a high level of literacy and symbolic capacity, whilst also engaging the reader in a regressed, primitive psychic state; (2) that successful reading requires of the reader that she let go of control, allowing ego boundaries between herself and the Other to dissolve as she immerses herself in, and becomes one with, the text, whilst simultaneously exercising a primal omnipotent fantasy of having control over the characters which she creates in her own imagination; (3) that reading is about hiding and being found, the reader both enjoying the ultimate anonymity in the process of reading, as the process occupies a private mental space, at the same time as finding herself revealed in the pages of her book, with a spotlight shone on her innermost thoughts; and (4) that reading takes the reader into an idiomatic state (Bollas, 1992, 1999, 2006) which is unique and possibly the most intensely personal thing a human being can do, given that no other individual is privy to the inner recesses of the reader's imagination, whilst at the same time

facilitating a kind of cosmic connection to humanity at large, as well as the global readership of any given text. Before elucidating each of these paradoxes in more detail, I introduce another unique element in my research: that of my methodology.

Methodology

In the chapter dedicated to it, I have presented my methodology as a bricolage of conceptual (Dreher, 2000) and heuristic research (Moustakas, 1990; Sultan, 2019), showing that it comes explicitly from a base in feminine writing (Cixous, 1975; Hoult, 2012), where creative and non-linear forms of enquiry are valued as a means to engage tacit, intuitive ways of knowing. Part of this feminine, heuristic approach incorporates the original idea of using a novel as a phenomenological method. Much as Archimedes whose *eureka* discovery ("*eureka"* being etymologically derived from the same Greek root as the word *heuristic*) happened seemingly by chance as he was going about his daily ablutions, so my finding my portal novel, *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971) was not consciously sought but came about as I followed an intuitive desire to re-read the novel, coinciding with the start of this research. There was no conscious intention to design a new approach to academic enquiry, but as I allowed myself to follow this implicit leading, so the methodology emerged. ***It*** found ***me*** (Sultan, 2019) as I engaged with it, and I allowed myself to trust and pursue the emerging process, which culminated in a new, innovative, and idiosyncratic way to research (Etherington, 2004).

At the same time as I carried out an in-depth exploration of both literary theory and psychoanalytic concepts with an eye to how they might elucidate the process of immersive literary reading, I engaged with a heuristic process of enquiry both into my own personal experience of reading but also with regard to recognising my portal novel, *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971), as a method of research. By this I mean that the phases of discovery outlined by Moustakas (initial engagement, immersion, incubation, illumination, explication, creative synthesis, and validation) (1990, pp. 27-34) were discernible in the process of identifying the novel as a methodology.

The aim of heuristic research is to recreate an actual living experience (Moustakas, 1999, p. 39, Sultan, 2019, p. 4) of the phenomenon in question, such that the reader of the write-up (or whatever form the creative synthesis might take) of such a study can expect to ***experience*** the phenomenon as she engages with it, rather than just read about it. She is not being told ***about*** the findings by being presented with a series of facts couched in academic arguments to arrive at an understanding, rather, she is being ***shown*** what the experience is like by evocative and creative means. This was my unwitting experience as I immersed myself in *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971). I was not simply engrossed in a nostalgic story (with all the pleasure that that entailed), I was actually being shown, as I traced Augustin's journey, what happens psychically to the reader of literary fiction. I was experiencing it first-hand at the point of reading. The novel itself was the gateway to illuminating this mysterious mental space inhabited by a reader. Once I grasped this, I trusted the process of illumination and continued to explore what the novel was showing me. This then became the bedrock of my research and my own experience of reading, with the adjunct of literary and psychoanalytic theory, was brought to bear on it, to validate it, not *vice versa*. *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971) is not just an allegory for reading, it is the gateway to encountering a felt sense of the reading experience. What I am saying is: read this novel and you will discover what it is like to undertake the mysterious journey of immersive literary reading. Flowing from this, then, and drawing on literary and psychoanalytic theory, as well as exploring and reflecting in depth on my personal journals describing my own reading experience, I was able to extrapolate some understanding of what happens in the mysterious process of immersive literary reading. I now summarise the key elements of these complex findings, starting with four key paradoxes which I identified.

Sophisticated regression

The first paradox I posit in my thesis is the fact that, in the process of engaging in immersive literary reading, the reader enters a primitive, regressed psychic space and yet simultaneously draws on sophisticated literacy and reasoning skills which

require an advanced appreciation of the symbolic. My argument is that this juxtaposition of primitive (dyadic) and mature symbolic (triadic) functioning characterises, and is unique to, the immersive reading experience. Rather than the one precluding the other (Lacan, 1977, 1993), I suggest that the literary reader's experience demonstrates that symbolic capacity and a primal state of merger are not mutually exclusive but can coexist and are, in fact, intrinsic to the reading process.

Literary reading is an aesthetic activity undertaken with a similar intention to other cultural pursuits such as visiting an art gallery, going to the opera, a concert, or the theatre: namely to edify, entertain and take the individual temporarily out of the concerns of everyday life to a higher plain of existence. Drawing principally on the work of Bollas (1978, 1982, 1987) and Milner (1950/2020, 1987a), I argue that, engaged in such a pastime, the person is transported to a psychic space which, by virtue of having dissolved personal boundaries between the self and the activity, is reminiscent of the blissful primal connection to the maternal. In the words of Bollas:

> It is usually on the occasion of the aesthetic moment ... that an individual feels a deep subjective rapport with an object (a painting, a poem, an aria or symphony, or a natural landscape) and experiences an uncanny fusion with the object, an event that re-evokes an ego state that prevailed during early psychic life .... (1987, p. 16).

In other words, he recognises that the very act of engaging with aesthetic experience takes the individual into a psychic position of merger with the activity, a state reminiscent of that fusion which pertains in early life between neonate and caregiver.

To immerse successfully in the experience of reading means that the reader surrenders personal ego concerns and conscious control of the process and regresses to an undifferentiated state where she becomes one with the text, such a condition mirroring that of primitive infancy (Milner, 1950/2010). This "psycho-somatic memory of the holding environment" … is "pre-verbal" (Bollas, 1987, p. 39), and yet, paradoxically, in the context of immersive reading, ***occurs in a literary***

environment, mediated through words and language, drawing on the reader's symbolic capacity, which has traditionally been associated with post-Oedipal development and Lacan's name-of-the-father (Bowie, 1991; Dor, 1998). This apparent contradiction, I conclude, is a unique part of the mystery of the reading experience, bringing together both dyadic and triadic relationships.

To a much greater extent than when engaging in other similar cultural pursuits, it is incumbent upon the reader of literary fiction to draw upon her imagination in the process of engaging with her text and converting the signs printed on the page into meaningful mental images. My suggestion is that reading requires ***both*** scholarly proficiency in literature ***and*** a facility simultaneously to regress to a primitive psychic position of merger with the text, being taken up in the imagination, and both are necessary prerequisites.

Omnipotence and relinquishing control

Developing further the tension and harmony of the opposite processes of simultaneous primitive and sophisticated functioning highlights the second key paradox which I propound in the engagement of immersive literary reading: that the reader both indulges in a fantasy of her own omnipotence in creating what she is reading, whilst simultaneously having to abandon mental control and be taken over by the text.

In Winnicott's psychoanalytic thinking, the undifferentiated state of merger with the maternal is coincident with the developmental stage of narcissistic omnipotence (Tyson & Tyson, 1990; Waddell, 2002; Winnicott, 1958, 1965/1990), where the infant enjoys the fantasy that she magically creates the breast or the mother's soothing whenever she needs it, rather than it being dependent on the collaboration and recognition of an Other. Because she has no notion of separateness or the independent existence of her caregiver, the infant makes sense of having her needs met by believing that she, herself, initiates the satisfying of her hunger or the attending to of her other bodily demands. "… [I]t is as though, from

the infant's point of view, he creates in fantasy the mother he needs and finds" (Phillips, 1988, p. 101). This sense of fantasised omnipotence is, I find, also the experience of the immersive literary reader, who, by conceiving in her imagination the characters in her text, regards them as her own creation, taking exclusive ownership of them and eschewing the contribution of the author in this collaborative exercise (thus maintaining a perceived dyadic connection to the text without having to accommodate the existence of a third party).

I devote chapter six to discussing the question of the intersubjectivity of the reading relationship, recognising that it is a joint enterprise, where reader and text co-create the experience (much as the satisfaction of an infant's needs depends on the attunement and cooperation of a sympathetic maternal presence), but the point I am making here is not about the actuality of things, but the reader's belief (at the point of reading) of her ownership of her reading, regarding herself as the sole originator, an illusion that mirrors that of the well-enough cared for suckling child.

My thesis is that, paradoxically, in order to enter this regressed psychic state of perceived omnipotence, it behoves the reader wittingly to abandon herself to her reading, to give herself completely over to it, and relinquish conscious mental power. She, thus, cedes control in order to believe herself to be in control. In discussing this process, I draw particularly on the work of Marion Milner (1950/2010), who writes of her own being unable to paint because she struggled to let go and sought to retain command of the process. "Whatever I did", Milner writes, "I seemed never able to forget myself" (Field/Milner, 1934/1952, p. 22). To abdicate control of her own mental and psychic functioning was counter-intuitive and took supreme effort but was the key eventually to her successfully being able to paint. She further notes:

> This letting go seems to mean … a letting go of the discriminating capacities which distinguish differences ... a state of blissful transcending of boundaries, which, to the conscious ego, would be identified with madness (p. 175).

Divesting the self of ego boundaries, as the reader must do in order to merge with her text and enter immersively into the reading experience, effects a reversal of the separation individuation process associated with normal psychic development (Mahler, Pine & Bergman, 1975), hence it would be construed as psychotic in any other context, as Milner notes: "This letting go ... involves an undoing of that split into subject and object which is the very basis of our logical thinking" (Milner, 1956/1987, pp. 195-196). Winnicott sees the kind of madness linked to connection with our intense primal feelings as being healthy and nourishing, remarking in a footnote that "Through artistic expression we can hope to keep in touch with our primitive selves whence the most intense feelings and ever fearfully acute sensations derive, and we are poor indeed if we are only sane" (Winnicott, 1945, p. 140).

The experience of merger with the text, which is the bedrock of successful immersive literary reading is described graphically by Belgian literary critic, Georges Poulet: "You are inside it; it is inside you; there is no longer either outside or inside" (1969, pp. 55-56), and the concomitant idea of omnipotence is captured by his observation that: "I am thinking the thoughts of another ... as my very own" (1969, pp. 55-56). There is a sense of ownership coincident with the notion of this psychic fusion, which lends the reader the illusion that she, herself, has created the characters in her text.

The key point I am highlighting is that it is the relinquishing of control and the attendant dissolution of boundaries between self and other which is the gateway to a successful reading experience, and which, ironically, enables the reader to connect with the primitive illusion of omnipotence and phantasised power over what she reads. The reader gives up control in order to experience the illusion of being in control.

Hiding and being found

A third paradox which I find is that whilst engaged in the immersive process of literary reading, the reader concurrently both loses herself and finds herself in the pages of her text. In discussing this phenomenon, I refer to Winnicott's notion of "being found" (1963b, p. 186), and show how, unlike in normal social interaction, where the individual is either concealed or exposed, immersive literary reading provides a relational matrix in which it is possible for the reader simultaneously ***both*** to hide ***and*** to be found.

Winnicott theorises that human beings are, at core, essentially isolated and alone, and desire to preserve their individual integrity and right not to communicate at a deep level, whilst also harbouring a strong desire to be found and recognised by an Other. He famously writes from his clinical experience that "***it is a joy to be hidden, but disaster not to be found***" (1963b, p. 186). My discovery is that the art of immersive literary reading provides simultaneously an opportunity for both these experiences: to be hidden and to be found. The reader, by virtue of adopting an aesthetic attitude and immersing herself in reading, is withdrawing from active social engagement, isolating herself from the everyday world in order to withdraw into her own private psychic space. If, at certain points in the process of reading, she is fortunate enough to experience herself ***found*** by what she reads, she can experience the joy of being profoundly known, whilst still within the matrix of an intensely safe, private environment. Reading offers the possibility of this unique experience. I detail in chapter seven examples from my own reading journals where I experienced a deep sense of being known through immersing in a text, times when my most secret thoughts and emotions were presented before me on the page in such a powerful way that the insight was cathartic, healing and ultimately transformational. Such personal revelations would have been much more painful or challenging had they occurred in the context of social conversation or even a therapy session, but my conclusion is that the reading matrix provides a container where the reader feels safely hidden from prying eyes and so is able to face

unpalatable truths and personal epiphanies nondefensively, and this is perhaps the only environment where this is possible in the same way.

Immersive reading is, I have discovered, uniquely placed to do this as, although aesthetic experiences of the other arts might also provide a similar crucible for emotional engagement, they occur in a more external arena and so do not afford the same level of covering and privacy as pertains with reading. Immersive literary reading is, arguably, one of the most private enterprises which an individual can undertake. Although a reader may be visible to observation, it is only her external persona that may be seen; she is psychically impenetrable as the emotion she is experiencing and the story with which she is engaged are perceived entirely within the confines of her own psyche. An onlooker may be familiar with the content of the novel being read but will be totally unfamiliar with that particular reader's experience of it at that point of reading. The reader, herself, remains hidden, unknown to the outside world. From the safety of this container, and as she abandons herself to the reading experience, she has the opportunity to be found and intimately known through what she reads.

Theorising about postnatal psychic development, Winnicott (1967b) claims that what the infant sees in the mother's face becomes her sense of self; in other words, she finds herself in what she reads in the maternal gaze. Although his theory has been criticised (Fonagy, 2001; Fonagy et al., 2004) for minimising the impact of the child's own individual character in determining how she relates to what she sees in her mother's face, the principle of finding the self in what is being read is, I believe, valid, and relevant to literary reading as well as the social reading of facial cues. For Winnicott, the process evolves over time such that, as the child matures and her identity becomes established, she is incrementally less dependent on mother's face in which to find her own reflection and is able to transition to using an actual mirror. I conclude that, although the rudiments of identity may be inaugurated from a young age, an individual's sense of self is fluid and constantly changing. So, the opportunity to keep looking in the mirror of the text in the

process of reading continues this process. It is not so much that the reader is finding herself for the first time, but that she is able to recognise things about herself which were only tacitly known before – perhaps because she is open to receiving this insight, feeling safely hidden and in a non-defended psychic state immersed in reading.

Private/personal and cosmic/oceanic

A further juxtaposition of opposites in the process of immersive literary reading which I adumbrate (my fourth paradox) is the fact that the experience is at one and the same time most intensely personal and also cosmic, connecting the reader to the corpus of humankind.

I have already noted above the fact that immersive literary reading is a solitary experience, by its very nature enjoyed by an individual set apart from social interaction. Even in the most public or crowded of places, a reader absorbed in a novel can be completely taken up in her own psychic space, oblivious to external activity or intrusion. I write in chapter five of interpersonal and intrapsychic conditions that need to be in place in order for the reader to engage in this way, recognising that external disruption, an unquiet mind or other preoccupation mitigate against the necessary concentration. When she is successfully occupied in reading, however, it is a completely private experience, access to that psychic space being denied to all would-be intruders. The reader is psychically alone in her secret world.

There are two ways, however, in which the experience, at the same time as being essentially private and personal, may be seen to be cosmic, and facilitate a connection between the reader and the wider world. Firstly, the state of regression already discussed, necessitating as it does a dissolution of boundaries between self and Other, places the reader in a psychically undifferentiated position where she is merged not just with what she is reading, but also with archetypal humanity at large, and secondly because, by virtue of engaging with the canon of literature, she

is inducted into a group of literati of that particular novel across the world and across time. I now consider each of these points in more detail, with reference to the thinking of Bachelard (1961a, 1968, 1969), Bollas (1978) and Milner (1956/1987).

I have already presented an argument for the centrality of the imagination in immersive literary reading, it being the medium through which words on a page are translated into meaningful aesthetic experience. Although memory and perception are drawn upon in the imagining process, imagination is not limited to the confines of individual experience (Sartre, as cited in Grimsley, 1971) and can create new horizons, which draw upon a much wider range of archetypal human life events. It presupposes a real world but is not a replica of it. Bachelard (1961a, 1961b, 1968), having started his work exploring literary fiction adopting a Cartesian view and wanting to eschew the irrational elements of the imaginal in favour of the empirical, finds himself ultimately bound to conclude that imagination is that "dynamic, primordial force that precedes the reflective activity of the intellect" (Grimsley, 1971, p. 55). It is that word ***primordial*** which is significant and embraces the idea of an archetypal as well as a primitive connection.

Bachelard refers to this state as that of an “anonymous childhood, a pure threshold of life, original life, original human life" (1969, p. 125, cited in Hans, 1977, p. 320), and goes on to clarify the idea of anonymity as being because the individual is in an undifferentiated state, so that what she is experiencing, rather than being a reminiscence of her own childhood, is essentially a remembrance of childhood in general, "a memory of the cosmos" (Bachelard, 1969, p. 119, as cited in Hans, 1977, p. 320). Milner, also (discussed in chapter four), refers to this collective, mystical state and the "feeling of being one with the universe" (Milner, 1956/1987, p. 196) and Bollas (explored in depth in chapter seven) describes it as actualising a “deep rapport between subject and object ... evoking an existential memory" (1978, p. 385). It is, I am suggesting, this cosmic, existential recollection with which the reader engages at the point of immersing in a text. As she experiences the falling away of

ego boundaries and merges with the novel, her psychic state evokes an existential, archetypal memory of global connection to the universe.

Bachelard sees archetypes as primordial images and claims that we all respond to these images in the same manner because they transcend the individual. He writes:

> "All great images reveal a psychic state" (Bachelard, 1969, p. 72) … when we experience a positive image of a house, we all experience images of our first primal houses and the resultant qualities of well-being, security, peace, etc ... This feeling of confidence is the quality of the primal nest, and thus, even though we all experience these images subjectively, we all react to their qualities in the same way: they are trans-subjective (Hans, 1977, p. 318).

Thus, reading of *home* in a novel is likely to evoke positive feelings for the reader, as she makes a connection to her first, primal home (i.e. the womb). The sense of being contained, safe, fed, and warm attaches to the archetype of home at a cosmic level, rather than just individual memories of a personal history of the physical houses of childhood (which may evoke positive or negative feelings). This is, then, the first way in which immersive literary reading connects the reader to the global, and it happens because, in surrendering herself to the activity, the reader transcends boundaries between self and Other, subjective and objective, personal and universal and they become one.

The second way in which this global connection may be seen is in the reader's participation in a communal readership of the canon of literature. In discussing the intersubjectivity of the reading relationship (chapter six) I explore the nature of the reader's connection to a non-human other (the text) and consider how, through this, she is also linked to the reading community at large. Classic fiction crosses the parameters of time and geography and retains a validity outside the context of its creation, being accessible to readers of subsequent generations and alternative locations and connecting with their shared experiences of humanity. I see something reminiscent of the "communion of the saints," referred to in the Anglican catechism (Book of Common Prayer, 1662, p. 23) coming into play here, in

the recognition of there being connection outside the confines of time, and even beyond the grave, between the reader, her text, and through her text, humanity at large. Much as Christian saints across centuries engaging with the liturgical words of the Apostle's Creed and, as they do so, drawing on the tradition of their forefathers and all those who held the faith in past times, share an experience across time and even transcending death with those who have preceded them, so, I believe, the readers of the canon of literature become part of a body of readership that transcends time and place, and by virtue of doing so, are connected in the unity of reading.

The paradox is exemplified that the individual reader, then, in the privacy of her own psychic experience of her text forges an existential union, not just with an abstract humankind, but with a body of people, each of whom in his/her own time and context, has engaged in a similar and yet unique literary journey.

Four paradoxes and my portal novel

Each of the four paradoxes presented above is illustrated through the narrative of my portal novel, *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971), and each is also exemplified in my experience of reading it. My reading journals document a very personal account of my own experience which cannot be categorically generalised to all readers everywhere but are the starting point from which to draw evidence of a closely examined reading practice and insight into being a reader. I now elucidate these two things further.

The story of Augustin Meaulnes shows how the eponymous hero embodies elements of both sophistication and regression, the first set of opposites which I am propounding the literary reader holds in tension. The confidence he exudes to his fellow schoolmates is matched by his clear competence in being able to drive the horse and cart skilfully, attend to a wound on the mare's hoof on the journey and find his way fearlessly across unknown terrain. He is an independent, accomplished young man. This coalesces with the reference to the reader's

sophisticated literary expertise, in both cases the respective skills being the conduit which facilitates the individual's experience.

Regression for Meaulnes is evidenced in the first instance by the place where his mysterious experience occurs. It is described as "le vieux Domaine perdu[61]" (p. 151), which implies a foreknowledge of, and familiarity with, this (unknown) place, and a sense of regressing and revisiting an Eden which has been lost, a return to an archetypal home (Bachelard, 1961a; Savage, 1964). Symbolically this is also borne out by the fact that the main protagonists leading the fête are children, representative of innocence and naiveté, which gives further credence to the presence of a regressed attitude (March, 1941; Ziegler, 2007). Indeed, Yvonne, the heroine with whom he falls in love, at parting with Meaulnes after their meeting during the fête, says: "Nous sommes deux enfants; nous avons fait une folie"[62] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 109), alluding to an immaturity in their dealings with each other and implying that their psychic state does not match their precocious actions.

My portal novel, as previously explained, is, however, more than just an allegory for the experience of reading, and reading it is, itself, the method by which the reader experiences the phenomena in question. More than just being reflected in the symbolism of the story of the novel, then, it behoves the reader of *Le grand Meaulnes* first-hand to exercise advanced capacity and simultaneously allow herself to regress emotionally. Sophistication is not requisite simply at a literacy level (though this may be particularly apposite if reading in a foreign language) but is demonstrated by the reader's capacity to tolerate not knowing. In the reading of every novel there is an element of this, but in Alain-Fournier's text there is a heightened sense of mystery with which the reader is confronted as to whether the *domaine perdu* is an actual location or a figment of Augustin's imagination. Commentators and literary critics have expressed a similar sense of puzzlement

[61] The old lost domain
[62] We are just two children. We have been foolish.

(Gibson, 1975, 2005) to that which I experienced when I first read the novel: was it all a dream? Had Meaulnes really visited the ancient manor house, or was it all in his imagination? The mystery was not resolved for several chapters. The capacity for negative capability which Bion describes as **"…** being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason" (1970, p. 125) requires a developed level of maturity and it is precisely this facet which is mobilised by the reader of *Le grand Meaulnes*. I had to read on, containing my curiosity, without clarity for some time.

In addition to exercising the ability to be with ambiguity in this way as well as exercising a literary fluency in a foreign language, in being absorbed in the goings on at the *domaine étrange*, I found myself temporarily inhabiting the world of a carefree child, experiencing a sense of nostalgia for days of innocence gone by, and the ecstasy of first love, identifying with Meaulnes's assertion:

> [63]... j'en suis persuadé maintenant, lorsque j'avais decouvert le Domaine sans nom, j'étais à une hauteur, à un degré de perfection et de pureté que je n'atteindrai jamais plus. Dans la mort seulement … je retrouverai peut-être la beauté de ce temps-là" (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 239).

When I first read the novel, I was about the same age as Meaulnes, in my final year at school, a place I loved and look back on very fondly. It was also the age at which I first fell in love and made an equally inappropriate match as that between Augustin and Yvonne. I experienced the wistful longing which Alain-Fournier describes as I soaked in the haunting words and identified with the melancholic feelings of loss.

The (childhood) days of innocence can never be re-evoked, but the magical allure of that primordial experience is felt to be compelling within the pages of the novel, as the reader allows herself to regress to a childlike state and feel the

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[63] Looking back, I am certain that when I discovered the nameless domain, I was at a pinnacle, a degree of perfection and purity that I will never recapture. Only in death … will I perhaps find again the beauty of that time.

nostalgia of it, sensing the impact of Meaulnes's words of being left with: "… [r]ien qu'un souvenir - le plus misérable - de ces beaux jours qui ne reviendraient plus[64]" (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 255). To indulge these melancholic feelings requires, ironically, that the reader let go and revisit an early emotional psychic state. Thus, sophisticated capacity and a regressed psychic state go hand in hand as the reader journeys through the novel.

The second paradox (of letting go of control whilst also feeling a spurious sense of control) is acted out by Meaulnes also. His immersion in his adventure and the goings on at the *domaine étrange* happen incrementally as he slowly adapts to the new situation in which he finds himself. On being invited on the first evening of his stay to put on carnival clothes and join the assembled throng, Augustin changes his shoes and dons an overcoat on top of his schoolboy garb (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 88). By the second day of his stay, he divests himself completely of his own apparel and dresses himself entirely in the clothes provided, thus symbolically showing how he has effectively abandoned himself to the experience and has lost the reticence of the previous night, throwing in his lot unreservedly with the assembled company, to the point that, on catching a glimpse of his reflection in a lake, he does not initially recognise himself. He has completely abandoned himself to the proceedings.

The illusion of his omnipotence is evidenced more in retrospect, once Meaulnes has returned to school. It is at this point that it becomes ***his*** adventure, and he is very possessive of it, reluctant initially to share any details of where he has been with any of the other boys. He goes to great lengths and even ends up in a fight in an effort to exclude his curious classmates from hearing about his adventure. When he does recount his experience, he assumes an avowed ownership of it, reflected in such comments as "... j'avais decouvert le Domaine sans nom[65]… " (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 239) – i.e. the old manor house was ***his*** discovery, as

[64] Nothing but a most miserable memory of those wonderful days, which will never return.
[65] I discovered the nameless domain

if he had wittingly created it, rather than simply stumbling upon it and joining in with the proceedings.

Meaulnes's view of his baby daughter is similarly parthenogenetic, and he exerts his power in the way he returns home the final time, to learn of her birth and then completely appropriate her, almost ignoring the fact that his wife died in labour, regarding her as ***his*** (sole) creation. Yvonne, his late wife, does all the hard work and Augustin turns up and possesses the spoils, seemingly showing no compassion for the child or François, who had grown very close in his absence. Thus, the Others in the story are disregarded while he acts out his sense of omnipotence.

Letting go for me as a reader was not difficult with this novel (This is not the case with every piece of literature I have attempted to read, as is illustrated in chapter seven), as I was enchanted by the writing style, the rich descriptive passages, and the subject matter. I quickly felt myself transported and swept along as I read. There was, however, certainly initially, a sense of possessiveness that I felt about the book, and a reluctance to share it. Since the age of 18, it had been ***my*** discovery, a text which had made a profound impression upon me, and I felt fiercely protective about writing about it and opening it up for scrutiny in the context of my thesis, lest some of the magic were lost and I became impoverished. Would a re-reading detract from the magic of the initial experience and would I lose something precious by sharing my thoughts and feelings in connection with it? Thus, I identify with both abandoning myself in my reading of it, and at some level believing it to be my own creation and being fiercely possessive of it.

The third paradox of hiding and being found also finds expression in Meaulnes's story. Parallels are apparent in his initial decision to play truant from school, fleeing from the confines of education and set curriculum to enjoy an afternoon away from his desk. The desire to retreat and avoid the scrutiny of his schoolmaster and demands of his contemporaries symbolises the longing to be

hidden. That the chapter detailing his adventure is entitled "L'évasion[66]"(Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 32) underlines his intention primarily to seek freedom, rather than focus on the purported quest of collecting M. and Mme. Charpentier from the station.

Once arrived at the *domaine étrange*, Meaulnes is furtive, seeking to remain out of sight "caché derrière les sapins, de crainte qu'on ne l'aperçut[67] …" (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 79) whilst also seeking a place to sleep. Happening upon what he thinks is a hayloft (though it turns out to be a large bedroom), he settles to rest on a bed until he is awoken by the sound of voices. At this point, the desire to be hidden becomes superseded by the experience of being found, which, remarkably, Meaulnes embraces. The two bohemian men who come into the room where he is sleeping express no surprise on finding him there, and simply address him, as if he were expected to be there, instructing him to rise and dress for dinner. Meaulnes's response, on being found in this way is equally complicit:

> Descendre au dîner, pensa-t-il, je ne manquerai pas de le faire. Je serai simplement un invité dont tout le monde a oublié le nom. D'ailleurs, je ne suis pas un intrus ici. Il est hors de doute qu['ils] ... m'attendaient"[68] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 87).

It is as if, seeking at one level to hide, he is expecting and, indeed, wanting to be found. The following morning as he again presents himself for breakfast, he has the strange sensation of being quite at home and expecting the assembled company to know him, anticipating at any moment "qu'une voix cordiale et joyeuse allait crier derrière lui: 'Déjà réveillé, Augustin?..."[69] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 101).

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[66] The escape
[67] Hidden behind the trees, for fear of being seen
[68] Come down for dinner, he thought, I will certainly not fail to do that. I shall simply be a guest whose name everyone has forgotten. Anyway, I am not an intruder here. They were definitely expecting me
[69] a friendly voice behind him saying: 'already up, Augustin?'.

Yvonne's comment: "Nous sommes deux enfants; nous avons fait une folie"[70] (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 109) illustrates Meaulnes's being found (in the sense of being found out) at a deeper level. Although uncomfortable for him to hear, and not deterring his adolescent ardour, there is a recognition that immature falling in love is foolish. He may present to the assembled company as a desirable, handsome young man, but the reality is that he is young, impulsive and being deceived by his feelings (and hormones). He is not in a position to make declarations of love and commitment; he is playing truant from school. Meaulnes, perhaps, *ipso facto*, is unable to take on board Yvonne's wisdom. Nevertheless, her statement shows that his innermost thoughts and feelings are known.

François's concluding statement in the epilogue also shows that Meaulnes's character is known. In recognition that Augustin will not settle and mournfully anticipating losing Meaulnes's child, he wistfully muses: "… je l'imaginais, la nuit, enveloppant sa fille dans un manteaux, et partant avec elle pour de nouvelles aventures[71]" (Alain- Fournier, 1913/1971, p. 338). That facet of Meaulnes's character with which François had become familiar from the very first day they met, when he fearlessly attempted to set alight some old fireworks, would mean that they would not be able to resume their erstwhile friendship, and the adventurer would leave him again. Although Augustin is not party to François's thoughts, it has the feeling of a moment of truth, and a harsh reality to be faced.

The sense of being hidden for me, as a reader of *Le grand Meaulnes*, somehow feels heightened because of my reading it in a non-native language. It offers me the additional cover of the layer of interpretation (from one tongue to another) as well as translating the words into imagery and mental understanding. Literacy at its basic level involves decoding symbols, even if widely accepted signs as in a formally accepted alphabet and language. This affords an element of psychic

[70] We are just two children. We have been foolish.
[71] I imagined him, by cover of night, wrapping his daughter up in his overcoat and leaving, with her, for new adventures

hiding because some form of interpretation is always necessary (Knights, 1995) and therefore remains unknown by an Other unless deliberately shared, and even then what takes place within the imagination of one individual is not directly communicable and is the unique experience of that reader. One individual may describe to another what she has read, but the listener's understanding of that reader's reading is yet another idiosyncratic reading. The reader's experience remains essentially hidden and unable to be directly replicated, thus affording confidentiality within the reader's own, exclusive psychic space.

For me reading *Le grand Meaulnes* feels luxurious, and I have a keen sense of indulging myself in the wistful longing of Alain-Fournier's novel. The flights of nostalgia to schooldays, the classroom setting and being carefree feel almost decadent, and I appreciate being able to keep these emotions hidden. The book offers me an acceptable cover under which to gratify a melancholic yearning for days gone by, unseen by prying eyes. While nobody knows my innermost thoughts as I read, at the same time I find myself intimately known through the text and it challenges me to face up to some of the grim realities of life which I am reluctant to face. It was not all unadulterated pleasure and I am confronted with the need to take responsibility for my chosen life path.

On reading Yvonne's admission that she and Meaulnes were young and had been foolish, I was transported to a conversation I had at the age of 18 with a mother figure, who cautioned me that the young man on whom I had set my heart was not a suitable match for me. Like Meaulnes, at the time, I paid no heed to her wise words, clinging to a romantic hope that I was unwilling to cede, but she had read the situation correctly, and I was ***known*** in that moment, even though I sought to remain hidden. Reading the novel brought this memory back and it was as if a spotlight had been shone on the shame I felt at my youthful foolishness. It was a powerful experience of feeling myself known, or found out at some level, which, though uncomfortable was also curiously reassuring. This illustrates Winnicott's (1963b, p. 186) concept of being found.

The fourth paradox in my thesis of the process of immersive literary reading is the recognition that reading is a solitary, intensely private undertaking and at one and the same time connects the reader to wider humanity. Whilst boundaries are firmly drawn to separate the reader from specific individuals in the outside world and preclude intrusion from others nearby, psychic differentiation between reader and text, subject and object, self and other is lost, such merger facilitating a sense of union with the universe, and the human condition at large.

Privacy is *sine qua non* in Meaulnes's story. As already discussed above, he is fiercely protective of his expedition, unwilling to share the secret of what happened to him with his schoolmates. It is an intensely private experience, to which François alone becomes privy and it takes some persuasion for him to include even his soulmate. François learns only second hand of Meaulnes's visit to the *domaine perdu*, and so is more of a bystander than participant. Although physical traces are visible of the personal transformation which he underwent (for example, the gilet which he is wearing on his return to school), it remains largely an internal psychic experience, communicable only by the manifestations of his changed behaviour and obsession with finding the old manor house and Yvonne again.

Connection to the wider world for Meaulnes comes from the old *domaine perdu*, Les Sablonnières, and what it symbolises, the history it represents, and the recognition of those who have gone before. "... [This] Lost Land ... is both proximate and unreachable, familiar and otherworldly" (Ziegler, 2007, p. 135). The heritage of Frantz and Yvonne de Galais is incorporated in the ancient building and recognition of their ancestry connects the fête to their forefathers, the continuity of the ages and their place as part of that. Rather than it being, as first appears, a random carnival where children preside, it has its roots in a long family tradition. The immediate, proximate world where Augustin and Yvonne come together is not an isolated event but is part of a greater human tradition.

That the reader of the novel retains absolute privacy has already been discussed, the forum in which the plot takes place being her imagination, and this being inaccessible to the outside. The only disclosure of this to others, like Meaulnes sharing with François, is of the reader's volition and her own recounting. In other words, she makes known as much or as little of the reading experience as she wishes to communicate, but it mostly remains locked up in her psyche, the ultimate private practice. Whatever reveries and resonances the reader experiences in the process of reading remain confidential. As I read the novel I connected with regret for inadvisable life decisions made in my youth (including the pursuit of a totally unsuitable romantic relationship that ended in heartache and lost opportunities), whilst identifying with the intransigent, obdurate determination to follow my chosen path without considering the future consequences.

On top of the private resonance with aspects of my own autobiography, Meaulnes's story is also the story of all young lovers, and the folly of falling in love a universal human experience. Circumstances and contexts may vary, but what is common to humankind is the reaching for Paradise lost, the idealisation of youth, nostalgia for carefree days and the sense of having the world and life ahead of one, feeling invincible and able to take it on. I found a strange comfort in recognising that some of my most painful personal experiences are archetypes replicated the world over, and part of the human condition. Thus emerges the application of the timelessness of reading works of literary fiction, of engaging across time and geography to global humankind, whose joys and sorrows are universal, who wrestle with the same conflicts, eternal quests for love and emotional upheavals in relationships the world over. It is this archetypal dimension which fosters the sense of communion across nations and generations to the essence of being human.

It will be seen from the foregoing discussion that these paradoxes are interdependent and coincident with each other, like the different facets of a single diamond, each aspect coming into view as it is held in another position or seen in an alternative light. They each characterise a part of the whole experience. Literary

and symbolic competency facilitates the ease of reading which expedites the capacity to let go, letting go being the gateway to the primal regressed state of merger with the text which promotes the illusion of omnipotently creating it. Letting go is also a prerequisite to the experience of being found within the text, which comes about from the necessary psychic withdrawal from everyday life, making it an intensely private process and yet a means of connecting with a universal humankind, which is also facilitated by letting go and the dissolution of boundaries between self and Other. My thesis is that the totality of these phenomena together creates for the reader a unique state of being, which makes her receptive to transformational experience.

A final paradox

Immersive literary reading, I am concluding, offers not just a respite from the cares of daily life and an opportunity to enter an appealing regressed psychic space, engaging with an alternative life experience, but also the possible therapeutic prospect of personal transformation. There is, however, one final paradox to be recognised, that emerged towards the end of my research process as a stark revelation from my personal experience: whilst literary reading can be generative, life-enhancing, and healing, it can also act as a psychic defence ***against*** life. Although a temporary psychic retreat, such as that afforded by immersive literary reading, can be generative (Freud, 1908/2003, p. 33; Steiner, 1993, p. 1), a problem arises where the desire to withdraw into the pages of a text becomes a surrogate for life instead of a transitory respite from it.

Throughout many of the earlier drafts of this research and in my journalling, I repeatedly profess my love of reading, and a startling insight emerged in exploring this in conversation with my supervisor, as it became apparent that, in hypercathecting reading, I simultaneously decathect life. Investing energy in the former means I can withdraw it from the latter. Initially it was suggested that this was because I hated life, loving reading being the antithesis of hating life. By absorbing myself in a vicarious experience of life in the pages of fiction, I

successfully evaded having to go out and live it myself. On further reflection, I realised that it was not so much about hating life *per se*, but the fact that I was frightened of life. I feared engaging with the wider world and found asylum in the safety of literary fiction, which became a trusted friend and safe haven through which to avoid engaging with some of the harsh realities of life (or at least to engage with them from a safe psychic distance). It was a constant in my life when bereavements, disappointments or the transience of relationships upset my world and I could take refuge in its reliability, always providing a place of psychic retreat and escape to a place of equilibrium. It was as if immersive literary reading were more real than life itself, and it was the object of my libidinal cathexis, an end in itself, rather than a conduit to experiencing a fuller life.

A question I had set myself when engaging with this research was to explore those processes which facilitated immersive literary reading, and what might mitigate against it being a successful, generative experience. In fact, as I recognised how I had used reading as a defence against living, it became clear that the original question had been unconsciously designed to preserve and validate my position that ***life was about facilitating reading, rather than reading about facilitating life***. I still stand by my thesis that reading ***can be*** generative, transformational, and life-giving, but the paradox is that it can also mitigate against life. I conclude that both positions are true. Having made this startling connection to my own position, the poignancy of the vignette from *Anna Karenina* (Tolstoy 1873-1877/1999) which I discuss in chapter five took on a new significance, which I now elaborate further.

The extract is taken from a point in the novel where Anna finds herself unable to settle to read, and I write of the barriers to her reading, and particularly her preoccupation with life events. Having recently fallen in love and being totally obsessed with thoughts of her new lover, Vronsky, Anna's desire is to go out and live. Tolstoy writes of her: "... it was unpleasant to read, that is to say, to follow the reflection of other people's lives. She was too eager to live herself" (1873-1877/1999, p. 99). Subsumed by a passion for her lover, Anna's desire to live at this point is so

strong that anything else is a pale reflection of that and she finds reading a less than satisfactory occupation, when her whole libido is directed towards Vronsky and how alive she feels with him. Life and reading are portrayed in direct contrast to each other. When, in the course of the novel, having established themselves in the domestic routine of living together, tensions later arise between Anna and Vronsky (largely because they cannot engage in public life together, she still being married), Anna's relationship with reading changes. No longer eschewing the pages of her book because the desire for life itself is too compelling, it transpires that:

> In the absence of visitors, Anna … read a great deal … She ordered all the books that were praised in the foreign newspapers and magazines they received and read them with the attention one gives only to what one reads in solitude ... (Tolstoy, 1877/1999, p. 635).

Although her longing remains to be with Vronsky and she resents his ability to travel and socialise without her, she seeks to hide from him the envy and jealousy his freedom arouses in her and cites her books as proof to him of her own enjoyment. When, on one occasion, exhorted by Vronsky: "I hope you won't be dull", Anna replies: "I received a box of books from Gautier's yesterday. No, I shan't be dull" (Tolstoy, 1877/1999, p. 637). The refuge Anna takes in reading appears to be a substitute for the social life of which she is deprived because of her infamous marital situation. Literary reading, thus, is presented here as the antithesis to actively engaging with life. For Anna it seems to be something to fall back on and with which to fill her time, when active life is not an option, a surrogate companion through her lonely days at home when her partner is absent. Drawing parallels from these vignettes, I have come to recognise that, for me, immersive literary reading has always been a proxy friend, a familial presence in my life from which I derive the intimacy that I do not find (or am too scared to find) in the real world. I generally find the pull to read greater than the pull to live.

In my portal novel *Le grand Meaulnes* (Alain-Fournier, 1913/1971) there is also a clear reflection of this process, but one which had passed me by in the earlier part of my research, when I had been focused solely on the mysterious psychic

journey of reading, and how compelling it was in its own right, rather than situating it in relation to the practice of living life. My discussion had centred around Augustin's preoccupation with his adventure (just as his life had been), rather than considering how it relates to his ongoing life.

On deeper reflection, however, I have come to identify a parallel process with my own life. I had presumably made an unconscious link at the time of connecting the process of reading with Augustin's story in the novel, but this deeper counterpart (of how the process of reading supersedes life itself and prevents him from living) was shrouded from me until the final months of my study. In line with my experience and in contrast to Anna Karenina, Augustin Meaulnes devotes all his energy to his quest to recapture his mystical experience (which I am likening to reading), such that even when the purported object of his quest becomes a reality, and he marries Yvonne de Galais, he is unable to stay with her and settle to enjoy life, but rather abandons her to continue his quest. Such is the strength of his libidinal cathexis to pursue his adventure (this time in the shape of a quasi-religious loyalty to Yvonne's brother, Frantz) that Meaulnes misses out on his own life, returning home only after his wife has died in childbirth. The holy grail of engagement with this alternative consciousness costs him being present to his real relationship and precludes the possibility of spending time with his young bride through her pregnancy. Such behaviour appears highly irrational but indicates the force of the seductiveness of the process and his desire to recapture an elusive experience, the desire for the experience itself taking precedence over all else and serving as a reason to avoid life and its responsibilities. To a great extent, I align myself with this ethos, in the way that my desire to read and be caught up in another world overrides my ability to engage with life and furnishes me with a respectable alibi by way of psychic defence.

Living and reading are presented here, too, starkly in opposition to each other: one either lives or reads about (other people) living. In reality, I believe, it is not such a clear binary. Reading does not preclude living, and life, as I have

discovered throughout this thesis, can be enhanced, even metamorphosed, by engaging immersively with literary reading. As with all the paradoxes highlighted in this research, reading and life, I suggest, are "both and" not "either or". It is the juxtaposition and integration of these seeming contrary processes which makes for the richness and uniqueness of this mysterious experience.

Postscript

Heuristic research aims to depict through rich, evocative means a particular experience of life (Moustakas, 1990), which the researcher explores from the inside by immersing herself in it (Sultan, 2019). To obtain this level of depth, numbers of participants are necessarily limited (often, as in my case, to the researcher alone), and the question may, therefore, be posed as to the extent of the applicability of the findings. Is this just the experience of one or a few co-researchers, or is the phenomenon of more universal pertinence, relevant to the population at large? Such an assumption could not be made on the basis of an individual research study. Furthermore, the person who engages in heuristic enquiry possesses, *ipso facto*, an academic ability and background which is not representative of a large cross-section of the general public, and this may be seen to be exclusive, particularly of marginalised groups of the population (McLeod, 2011).

The matter of relatability of findings is, additionally, not just an issue of methodology. Deep exploration of an individual's internal experience of literary reading, such as I have undertaken in this research, presupposes that the individual concerned possesses a fairly sophisticated level of literacy, as well as a good enough relationship with reading to attract her to engage in the pastime, as well as a high capacity for reflexivity with which to relate her reading to herself. These criteria also exclude a cross section of society, capacity for literacy varying from person to person, as diversity of capability and educational opportunity in particular affect someone's proficiency in, and enjoyment of, reading. Negative early experiences in the classroom, cultural preferences/norms, atypical neurological profiles, or socioeconomic constraints may lead to negative transferences even to the concept of reading, and prejudice a person's relationship with reading such that she has a very different starting point from where I began this study. The question presents itself as to whether it is possible for this experience of losing and finding oneself in a book to be a universal phenomenon.

Finding, as I have, that the reading of literary fiction can not only be enjoyable, but also potentially therapeutic and transformational, means it is desirable to make the experience accessible to a wider readership, and particularly marginalised groups of society for whom the cost of psychotherapy may be prohibitive, as well as those who do not naturally find pleasure in the reading of fiction; but is it a reasonable expectation? Whilst this was not the brief of my own study, further research specifically addressing this question would be of value, to explore the experience of reluctant or marginalised readers and investigate some of the blocks to reading and how to overcome them.

There are implications here for reviewing how reading is taught in schools. It behoves those making decisions about the teaching of reading to promote and value this occupation, helping students to develop an appreciation of a variety of literature, to take time to explore their own reactions to the stories they read, and process what this evokes for them (Roe, Smith & Kolodziej, 2018), in order to acquire the reflexive awareness necessary for self-transformation. The subjectivity of each different reader needs to be valued and honoured in this undertaking and recognised in the national curriculum (Pearson, 1996). I find, in chapter six, of the need for "attunement" (Bowlby, 1998; Fonagy, 2001; Stern, 1991; Wallin, 2007) between reader and text, to facilitate the requisite letting go (Milner, 1934/1952, 1950/2010) of ego concerns to enter fully into the reading experience, and this means that a suitable choice of text needs to be identified. While I note my own predilection for Victorian fiction, I realise that this genre has no superiority over any other, it being simply my own personal partiality. Each individual reader needs to have the opportunity to seek out and indulge her own preferences, and this is an issue to be addressed when selecting texts for study. A level playing field for all learners does not necessarily mean each student reading the same texts (Pearson, 1996), and this has implications for the scope of literary fiction available for learners in the education system, so that each individual has opportunity to grapple with novels with which she has an affinity, which would enhance the likelihood of being able to engage deeply with them.

In many ways, then, this research study is just a starting point from which further enquiries might emanate, to explore whether a transformational reading experience might commonly occur in the reading of literary fiction, and if so, how to make it more accessible to a wider readership.

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